



COMBAT

Belleau Wood 1918

US Marine

VERSUS

German Soldier

Gregg Adams





COMBAT

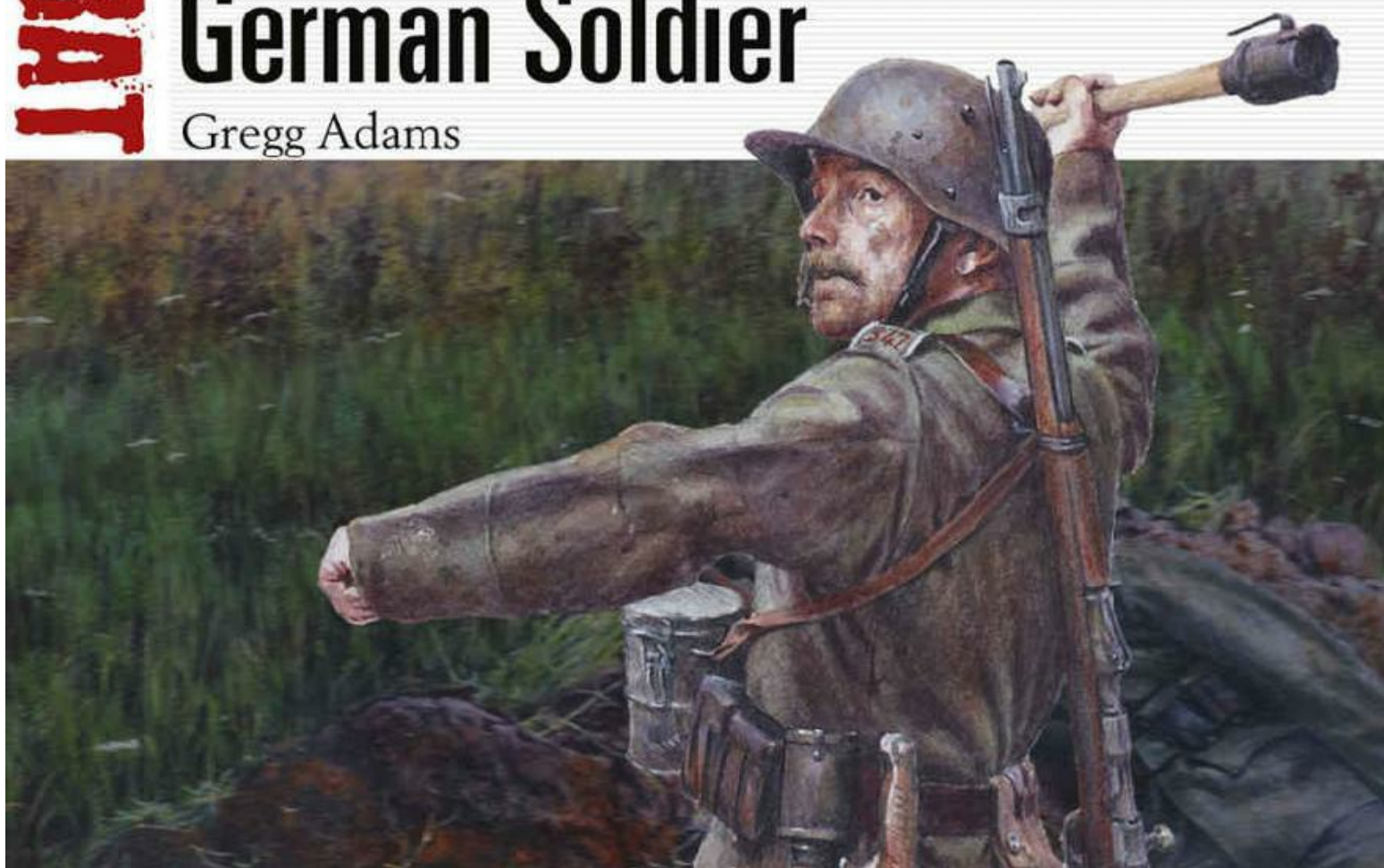
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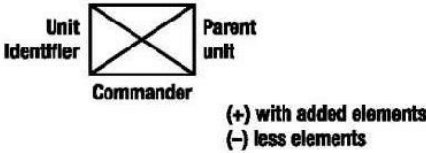
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Key to military symbols

xxxxxx 	xxxxx 	xxx 	xx 	x 	III 	II
Army Group	Army	Corps	Division	Brigade	Regiment	Battalion
I 	●●● 	●● 	● 		● 	
Company/Battery	Platoon	Section	Squad	Infantry	Artillery	Cavalry
Airborne	Unit HQ	Air defence	Air Force	Air mobile	Air transportable	Amphibious
Anti-tank	Armour	Air aviation	Bridging	Engineer	Headquarters	Maintenance
Medical	Missile	Mountain	Navy	Nuclear, biological, chemical	Ordnance	Parachute
					MG 	
Reconnaissance	Signal	Supply	Transport movement	Fortress or static	Fortress machine gun	

Key to unit identification



Introduction

This book examines the first battles between the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and the Imperial German Army in June 1918. Although Marines had been training since the United States declared war on the German Empire on April 6, 1917, they soon found that fighting the German Army provided their most effective, if costly, education.

In April 1917 the US Army was composed of approximately 127,000 regulars and 80,000 mobilized National Guardsmen. The US Marine Corps, part of the Department of the Navy, totaled a little less than 14,000 officers and men. To satisfy the political need for American troops to be seen in France, the 1st Division and the separate 5th Marine Regiment sailed in June 1917. By May 1918, there were four American divisions that the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), General John J. Pershing, felt could be used in an emergency: the 1st, 2d, 26th, and 42d. In addition, the recently arrived 3d Division was soon judged capable of entering combat. Of these five divisions, the 1st and 3d were composed of US Army regular units, the 26th and 42d were National Guards, and the 2d was unique in that it had one infantry brigade of Army regulars and one of Marines.



The German ideal of an attack is portrayed in this photograph. The lack of actual explosions from artillery, the perfectly placed smoke canisters in the background, a photogenic “corpse” in French uniform, and a camera angle looking at the leading attackers make it almost certain that this was a staged image. (Bettmann/Getty Images)

During three previous years British and French offensives had failed to break the deadlock of the Western Front. The one German offensive since 1914 had been the 1916 battle of Verdun, with the goal of inflicting maximum attrition upon the French. Attrition went both ways, however; casualties around Verdun amounted to 542,000 French and 434,000 German by December 1916. On the Eastern and Balkan fronts Germany and her allies had conquered Serbia, forced Romania to surrender, and caused the collapse of Russia. In October 1917, Italy suffered a major defeat at the hands of an Austro-German offensive and only stabilized its lines with the help of British and French divisions diverted from the Western Front. With Russia out of the conflict, Germany’s high command, the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), planned to end the war with an offensive on the Western Front; success had to be achieved before the United States could bring her manpower and industry to bear.



American troops in an improvised position behind a tree line. The rifleman closest to the camera carries his pack, extra ammunition pouches, and bayonet in its holder. The man in the background appears to be an officer; he does not have a pack or a rifle. This was probably a posed photograph for the home front. (Fotosearch/Archive Photos/Getty Images)

By March 14, 1918, the German Army had 188 divisions available in the West. Germany focused on defeating the British in the vicinity of the Somme and driving a wedge between the French and the British. On March 21, the *Michael* offensive caught the British Fifth Army by surprise. The British were forced back across the 1916 Somme battlefield until April 4, when they stabilized their line and the German attackers outran their supply. On April 9 the British First and Second armies were attacked south of Ypres (Operation *Georgette*) until April 29. These two offensives resulted in approximately 345,000 Allied (mainly British) and 300,000 German casualties without achieving a strategic victory.

With Allied attention focused on the British front, General Erich Ludendorff attacked the French forces northeast of Paris. He hoped the French would concentrate their reserves to protect Paris, further weakening the British before he attacked them again. On May 27, 1918 the *Blücher* offensive started which shattered the defenses of France's 6e Armée. This success caused the OHL to continue the drive, threatening Paris. The *Blücher* offensive brought to a head an argument about American troops that had been going on for a year between the Allies. In simple terms, the British and French leaders had been pressing the Americans to integrate their infantry into existing British and French divisions to make up for heavy casualties of the previous years. The US Government gave explicit orders to Pershing forbidding this. The only way Americans were going to fight the Germans was in American units. Pershing was not blind to the problems of his allies, and in a gesture that could have resulted in him being relieved of command, he offered his best-trained divisions to the French for use in the crisis. Soon the 1st, 2d, and 3d divisions went into action to stop the German threat to Paris. On both sides were many who questioned if the Americans would fight and stand up against the veteran Imperial German Army.

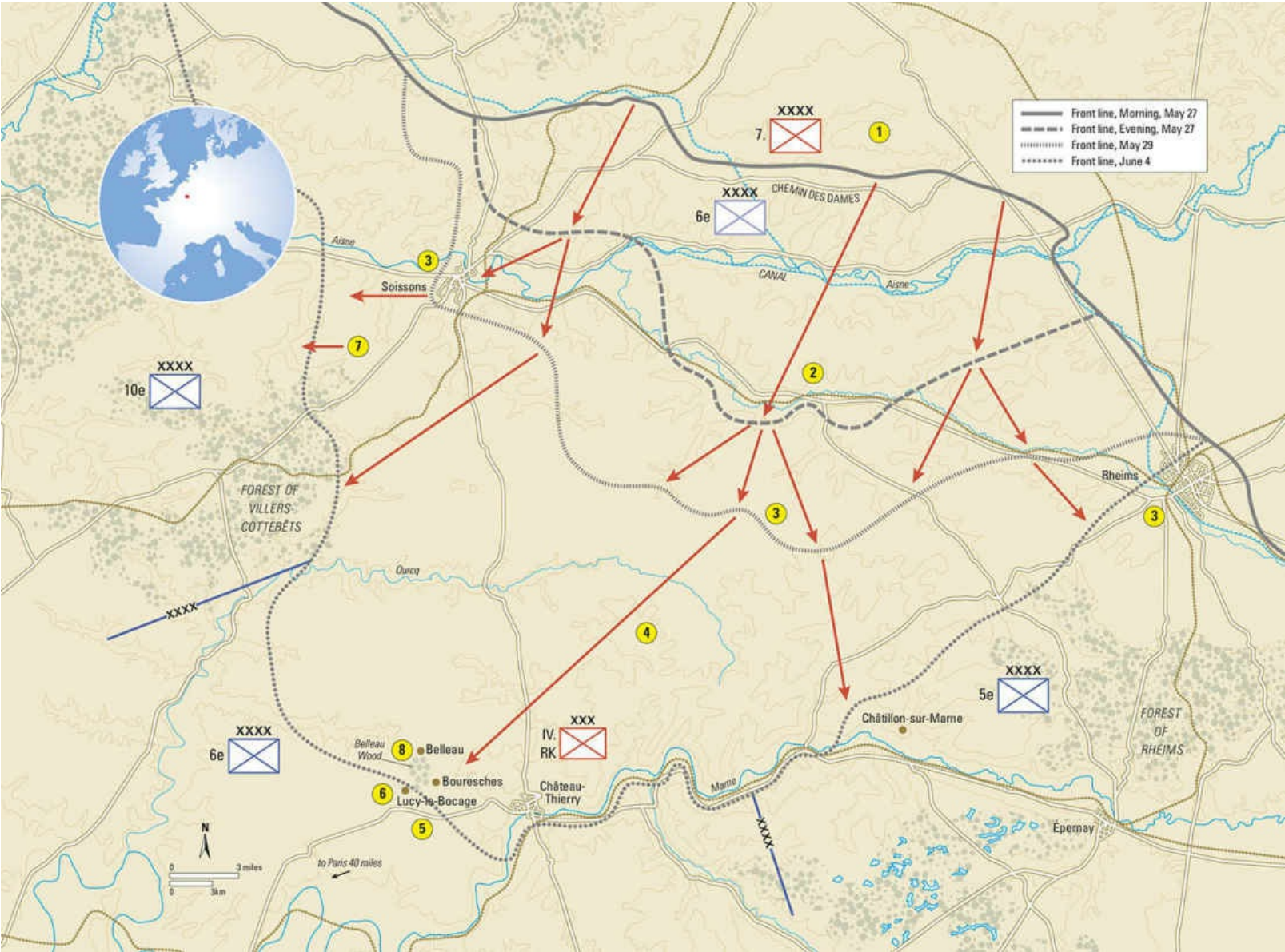
On June 3, 1918 Operation *Blücher* was in its eighth day of advances. Troops of the 6e Armée were falling back, so far unable to stop the advance of 7. Armee. Confusion and despair had started to grip some of the French. That afternoon, northwest of the town of Château-Thierry, near a small forested hunting preserve named Bois de Belleau, a retreating French major encountered an unfamiliar sight. An American rifle company belonging to the 4th Marine Brigade of the AEF's 2d Division was setting up defensive positions. The major ordered the company to retreat. The

company's commander, Captain Lloyd Williams, USMC, replied: "Retreat, hell we just got here." Within days Williams was killed in action and the threat to Paris was receding. By June 30, over 5,000 US Marines were dead or wounded and had earned the US Marine Corps a place among history's legendary fighting forces.

The *Blücher* Offensive, May 27–June 26, 1918

MAP KEY

- 1 Early morning, May 27:** Preceded by heavy artillery bombardment, 17 German divisions of 7. Armee attack France's 6e Armée, holding the Chemin des Dames front northwest of Rheims with four French and three battered British divisions.
- 2 Nightfall, May 27:** Assault units of 7. Armee advance as much as 12 miles into the rear of the 6e Armée. The Allied forces crumble under the heavy German attack.
- 3 May 28:** 7. Armee continues to advance 3–5 miles farther in the center, with a salient, or bulge, forming as the French hold the eastern and western sides of the breakthrough. French reserves are thrown in as fast as they arrive to try to slow down the German advance.
- 4 May 29–June 4:** In the teeth of determined French resistance, German losses, and difficulties moving artillery and supplies forward, 7. Armee advances another 15–18 miles. The Germans make preparations to launch fresh attacks against the western side of the salient; IV. Reservekorps is ordered to guard the southern flank of the new attack and await developments.
- 5 June 4:** German forces are now 40 miles from Paris. The US 2d and 3d divisions, including the 4th Marine Brigade, take position between Paris and the Germans.
- 6 June 5–25:** The 4th Marine Brigade fights to secure Belleau Wood.
- 7 June 9–13:** A new German offensive west of Soissons makes little progress as the French, forewarned by deserters, lure the attackers into preplanned killing zones.
- 8 June 26:** The 3/5th Marines completes the capture of Belleau Wood.



The Opposing Sides

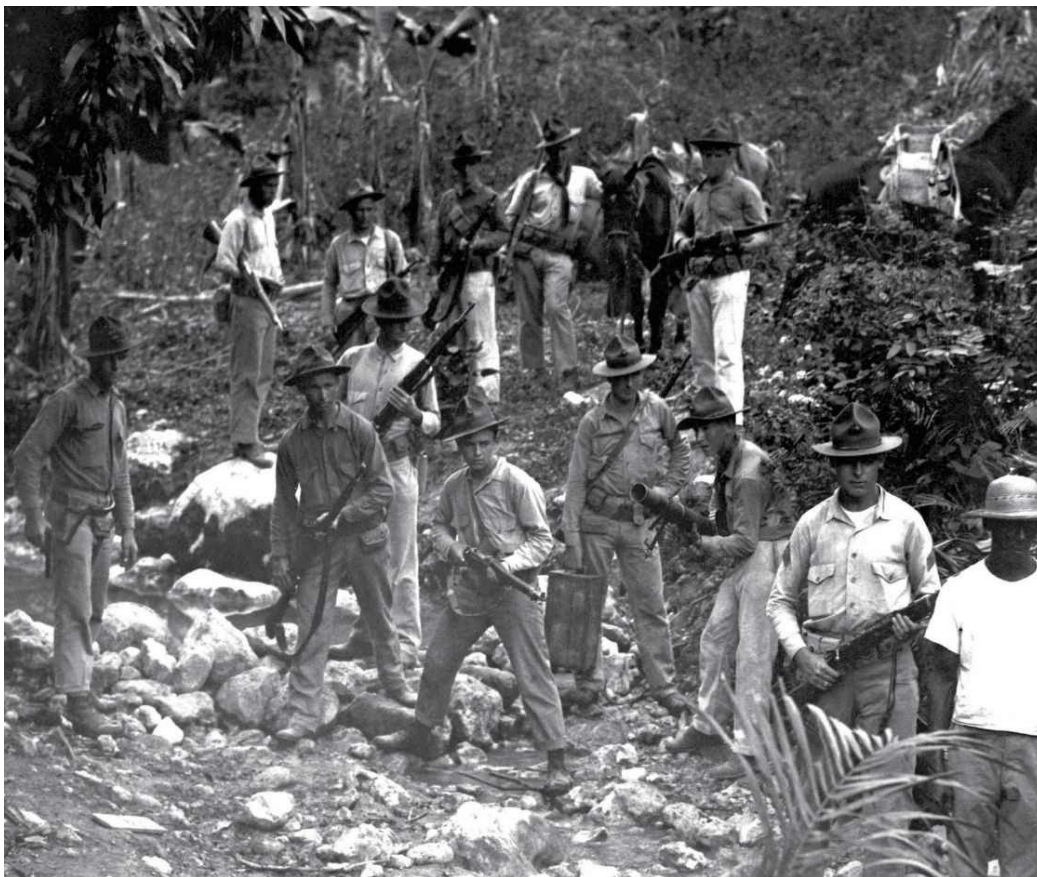
ROLE, ORGANIZATION, AND TACTICS

USMC

In the first years of the 20th century the US Marine Corps (USMC) was employed in various overseas expeditions in the Philippines, China, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Mexico, producing a cadre of personnel experienced in small-unit actions. On April 6, 1917 the Corps contained 13,725 officers and men; 4,784 of these were deployed overseas and 2,677 were assigned to Marine Detachments onboard US Navy ships. The Corps had four regiments: the 1st, a fixed defense regiment; the 2d, on duty in Haiti; and the 3d and 4th, deployed to the Dominican Republic. Each of these regiments was organized into ten (sometimes fewer) companies. A prewar USMC company was essentially an independent unit, organized to be sent wherever needed and numbered uniquely, e.g. the 22d Company.

After declaring a state of war with the German Empire, Congress authorized the Corps to expand. With no apparent need for amphibious operations, or seizure and defense of advanced naval bases, the Marines sought another opportunity to get into the war. As a result of Navy and Army discussions a regiment of Marines was included with the newly organized 1st Division that sailed for France in June 1917; this was the 5th Marine Regiment. Organized at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, beginning on May 29, 1917, the regiment was assembled from Marine companies in the United States and companies brought back from Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The 5th Marine Regiment sailed for France on June 14, 1917 with a strength of 70 officers and 2,689 enlisted men, which was roughly one-sixth of the USMC strength at the time. The 6th Marine Regiment was activated at Quantico, Virginia, on July 26, 1917 and was completely in France by February 6, 1918. Unlike the 5th Marine Regiment in which 12 percent of the personnel had four or more years' service in the Corps, the 6th Marine Regiment, comprised of newly formed companies, counted only 3 percent of its personnel with four or more years' service. The 6th Marine Regiment was unique among the AEF, however, in that 60 percent of its personnel had either attended or graduated from college.

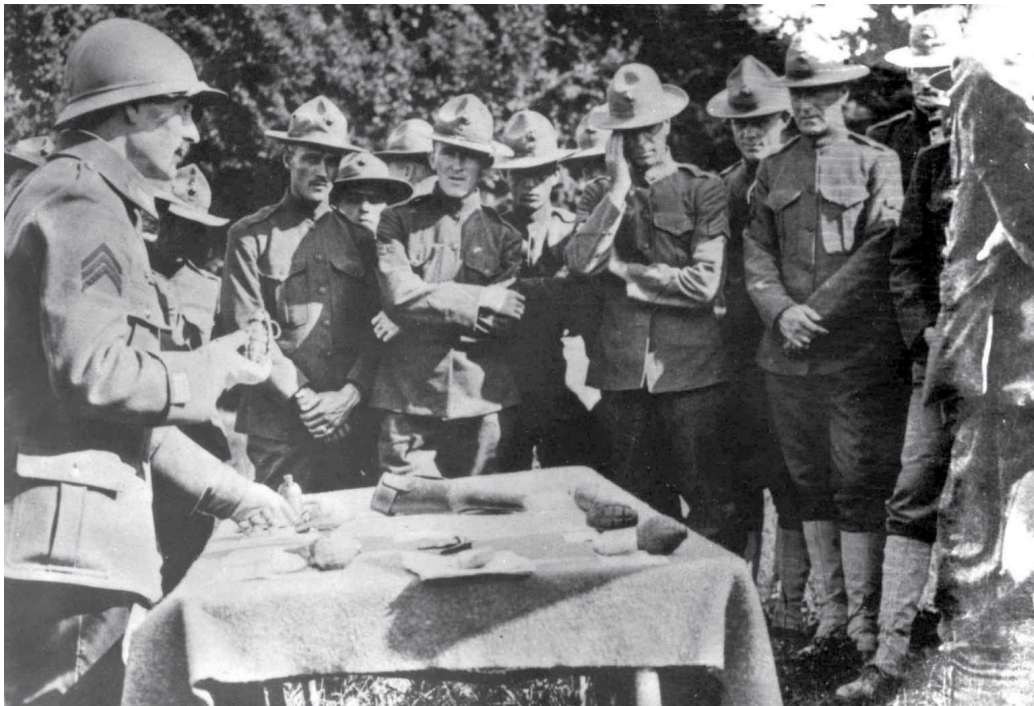
In September 1917, the AEF's 2d Division was established. With one Marine regiment in France and a second soon to arrive, the AEF decided that one of the 2d Division's two infantry brigades would be formed from these Marines. This brigade was designated the 4th Marine Brigade and paired with the 3d Infantry Brigade (9th and 23d Infantry regiments of regulars) to form the 2d Division. Since an AEF infantry brigade included an organic machine-gun battalion, the 1st Marine Machine Gun Battalion was shipped to France to join the 5th and 6th Marine regiments in the 4th Marine Brigade. Once in France, the battalion incorporated two companies already overseas. Following the AEF's scheme for numbering machine-gun battalions, the battalion was designated the 6th Marine Machine Gun Battalion upon joining the brigade.



Prior to 1917, US Marine Corps combat experience came from various overseas expeditions in places such as Haiti, shown here. These expeditions provided experience in small-unit operations, but were of limited use in preparing Marines for the Western Front. (Interim Archives/Archive Photos/Getty Images)

The Marines now reorganized their units to conform to the AEF's Tables of Organization and Equipment (TO&E). A regiment now comprised three battalions, each with four infantry (or rifle) companies, one regimental machine-gun company of 178 men, and a large regimental headquarters company of 349 men that included a platoon of six British 3in Stokes trench mortars and a platoon of three French 37mm M1916 trench guns. Prior to adopting the AEF organization, Marine battalions each comprised three rifle companies and one machine-gun company (with 16 machine guns). The original Marine battalion organization proved nearly identical to the "triangular" infantry battalion of three rifle companies and one heavy-weapons company (machine guns and mortars) adopted after the war.

Heavy-machine-gun support was provided by attaching a machine-gun company, either the regimental company or one of the brigade's machine-gun battalion's companies. The regimental machine-gun companies were attached to the 1st Battalion in each regiment. In the 4th Marine Brigade, usual policy was to attach each machine-gun company to a specific battalion. This allowed machine-gunners and riflemen to develop a sense of unit cohesion.



The AEF, including the 4th Marine Brigade, adopted many French weapons and trained using French doctrine. By 1918 there were individuals who felt that hand grenades were the infantry's best weapon on the battlefield, an idea many Marines viewed with skepticism. (USMCHD 35-LL-528797)

In June 1918, USMC small-unit tactics in France were based on two French manuals that had become the foundations for the 2d Division's tactics. These were a short pamphlet titled *Instructions for the Offensive Combat of Small Units* and a longer book called the *Manual for Commanding Officers of Infantry Platoons*. These writings laid down doctrine for infantry attacks within the context of trench warfare. The French concept was that an attack would be carried out with a platoon (or for the Marines, a half-platoon) advancing in four waves. First, the automatic riflemen would advance while firing to force an enemy to stay down in his trenches; second, the rifle grenadiers would advance while firing over the heads of the automatic riflemen to hit the enemy sheltering in their trenches; third, advancing riflemen would provide aimed fire at any exposed enemy; and finally, the hand grenadiers would advance, throwing grenades into the enemy's position. If the attacking platoon encountered resistance it could not overcome, it would deploy and seek to pin down the enemy, so that its advancing neighbor could outflank the resistance. If a strongpoint did not threaten the advance, it would be surrounded and left behind. The *Manual* emphasized the need for aggressive leadership at the small-unit level and clearly stated that success was to be exploited without waiting for orders.

Artillery support for the 4th Marine and 3d Infantry brigades was provided by the 2d Division's 2d Artillery Brigade. This brigade consisted of the 12th and 15th Field Artillery regiments, each with 24 French 75mm field guns, and the 17th Field Artillery Regiment with 24 155mm howitzers. Included as divisional artillery was one battery with 12 6in trench mortars. As in the case of infantry tactics, French tactical doctrine was adopted for the AEF's artillery.

German

The German Army was a conscription-based army structured on successive tiers of obligation to serve based on age until 45 years old. A man began his service at age 20 when called for duty with the Active army for 2–3 years, followed by 4–5 years' service in Reserve forces, then 11 years'

service in the Landwehr, and finally 7 years in the Landsturm. Each year the class of 20-year-olds was called to service. To expand the Army and replace losses the Germans began to call up annual conscript classes before they were due in peacetime. The 1914 class was called up on schedule in September 1914 and the 1915 class was called up in April–June 1915, but the 1916 class was called up in August–November 1915, about one year in advance. The 1917 class was called up in January–May 1916, and the 1918 class in September 1916–January 1917. The class of 1919 started being called up in January and February 1917 and the 1920 class in the spring of 1918.

The German Army expanded from its August 1914 order of battle of 51 Active and 32 Reserve divisions to 241 divisions by the end of 1917. Throughout the war a total of 251 divisions existed. In 1918 all infantry divisions were triangular with three infantry regiments, each with three battalions, and one field-artillery regiment of three battalion-size *Abteilungen* – two equipped with 12 7.7cm field guns each and one with 12 10.5cm light field howitzers.

The 1918 German division had a theoretical infantry strength of 6,984 men in nine rifle battalions and 1,233 men in nine machine-gun companies. In contrast, an American division had an establishment infantry strength of 12,312 men in 12 rifle battalions and 2,404 men in 15 machine-gun companies. Before the German offensives of Spring 1918 began, German battalions were each allocated 850 infantrymen plus those men in the machine-gun company. Since the start of the *Blücher* offensive the Germans had suffered significant casualties among their infantry. 10. Infanterie-Division had participated in the initial attack on May 27 and on that day had an infantry strength of 6,700 men out of a paper strength of 7,650. By June 5, the division's infantry strength was approximately 3,700. 237. Infanterie-Division had been in reserve until June 1 and its infantry was also understrength; Infanterie-Regiment 461 reported its strength as 28 officers and 1,141 other ranks available on June 6 to defend Belleau Wood. Against these reduced divisions, the Marines entered combat at near full paper strength.

Offensive tactics used by German infantry and supporting artillery were documented in the January 1, 1918 document *Der Angriff im Stellungskrieg (The Attack in Position Warfare)*. Based on experience from all battlefronts this document emphasized independent small-unit actions down to the squad level. *Kompagnie* and *Zug* leaders became coordinators of squads executing fire and maneuver on the battlefield and responsible for feeding reserves into the fight. Continuing to advance into the depth of enemy defensive positions and leaving strongpoints to be reduced by following troops was intended to disrupt the enemy and force him off-balance. *Der Angriff im Stellungskrieg* called on all junior leaders, and soldiers themselves, to exercise their initiative to accomplish broadly defined mission objectives.

Defensive tactics had been developed to a high standard during the 1915, 1916, and 1917 Allied offensives. Ground was not defended just for the sake of holding it. Only terrain critical to the retention of a position was held. Defense relied on interlocking machine-gun fields of fire, and utilized small, prompt counterattacks to stop an enemy. If feasible, German defenders would pull back a short distance, letting a preparatory barrage fall on empty positions. A shortcoming of this doctrine was that it had developed from experiences in fighting from well-prepared defensive positions during the preceding years. The 1918 German offensives had pushed the front into areas where positions had to be built hastily and therefore lacked the carefully engineered positions, fields of fire, and pre-surveyed artillery firing positions that had characterized the previous three years of fighting.

The adoption of new infantry attack tactics caused the Germans to select their best men for units

that had offensive missions. While planning the 1918 offensives, the OHL decided to give quality ratings to each division. The best divisions, designated attack divisions, received the best personnel and equipment. Other divisions were labeled position divisions, and were further rated, some being thought able to defend against attacks while others were deemed suitable to man only quiet sectors of the line. This segregation of units led to some position divisions quickly deteriorating in the stress of combat during the summer of 1918.



These German infantrymen are carrying stick, or “potato masher,” hand grenades. In the photograph’s center the butt end of an MG 08/15 light machine gun can be seen; the weapon is probably being carried over the shoulder of the gunner. (USMCHD, 89908)

Opposing the 4th Marine Brigade during the fighting at Belleau Wood were elements of five divisions under the command of IV. Reservekorps. These five divisions represented a cross-section of the German Army of 1918. There were two prewar active divisions and three wartime-raised divisions: 10., 28., 87., 197., and 237. A prewar active assault-rated formation, 10. Infanterie-Division still had two of its prewar infantry regiments and one regiment formed during the war, while 28. Infanterie-Division, also a prewar active assault division, still had three of its prewar infantry regiments. Formed in August 1916, 197. Infanterie-Division was a high-quality position division. Formed in January 1917, 237. Infanterie-Division was a position division with three war-raised regiments having 50 percent of their personnel from the 1918 conscription class, 25 percent returned wounded, and 25 percent veterans taken from other units. Formed in June 1915 from miscellaneous *Ersatz* (replacement) battalions on the Eastern Front, 87. Infanterie-Division was rated as a low-grade position division.



Contrary to popular opinion, artillery such as this German 21cm Mörser (mortar) was the major cause of casualties not machine guns. Late-19th-century infantry tactics using skirmish lines and close supporting columns were rendered obsolete by the size, range, and volume of early-20th-century artillery. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

FIREPOWER

USMC

The majority of Marines in World War I France were riflemen armed with the M1903 Springfield, a .30-caliber bolt-action rifle with a five-round magazine. Unfortunately for the Marines in France, their automatic rifle in June 1918 was the French Chauchat. From the beginning, the Chauchat was the subject of French Army complaints similar to the complaints that US forces would make. The Chauchat easily jammed and its aim was inaccurate, which made it a subject of derision to marksmanship-conscious Marines. Its only redeeming feature was its availability.

Utilizing French production initially to equip US forces meant that the 4th Marine Brigade used French grenades. Hand grenades were of two main types: smooth-cased blast grenades termed OF (for offensive) and segmented-case fragmentation grenades termed DF (for defense).

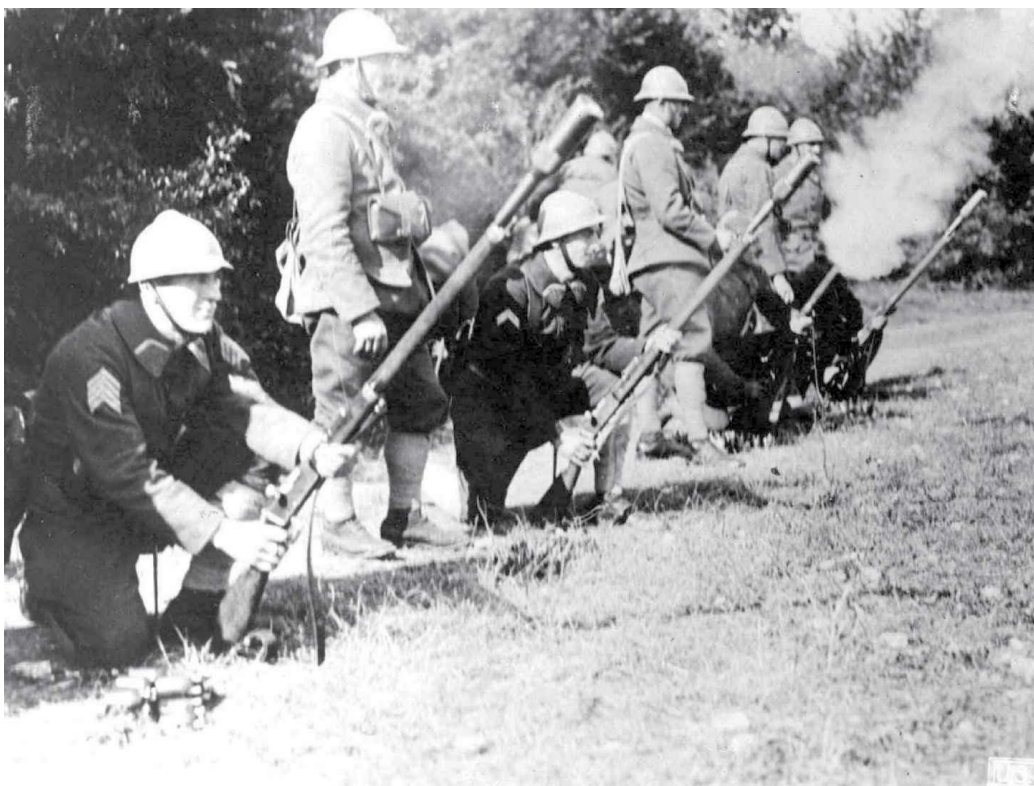


Rifle marksmanship was (and remains) a foundation of USMC combat skills; exemplified by the motto “Every Marine a rifleman.” The

Corps entered the war with a rewards system based on monthly pay bonuses to encourage Marines to strive to be the best shots possible. Three levels of qualifications existed: expert (\$5.00 per month bonus), sharpshooter (\$3.00 per month), and marksman (\$2.00 per month). Two out of the nine weeks’ recruit training program were devoted to rifle training. In 1916 59.5 percent of recruits qualified as marksmen or higher; the influx of new recruits resulted in the June 1917 recruits’ qualifications falling to 37.9 percent which was, to the Commandant of the Corps, unacceptable. Intensification of rifle training resulted in 42.6 percent of recruits qualifying in August 1917.

Marine marksmen and snipers would make conditions within Belleau Wood dangerous for front-line Germans, but overconfidence in Americans’ rifle prowess led to the failure of Brigadier General James G. Harbord’s efforts to complete the capture of the wood using snipers and grenades. (NARA)

The six machine-gun companies within the 4th Marine Brigade were equipped with French Hotchkiss tripod-mounted machine guns. Each machine-gun company had 16 guns, giving the brigade a total of 96 machine guns. In theory, four of an AEF company’s guns were in reserve, but Marines usually employed all 16 guns in combat. Held at regimental level were two further weapons: the British 3in Stokes trench mortar and the French 37mm Hotchkiss trench gun.



French soldiers demonstrating the Vivien-Bessieres (VB) rifle grenade, which used a firing cup attached to the muzzle of a rifle that

launched a 50mm grenade weighing 3lb to 200yd. The grenade was powered by firing a blank round in the rifle. Theoretically, they were fired in volleys over the heads of advancing automatic riflemen and hand grenadiers. In combat, Marines soon mixed riflemen, hand grenadiers, rifle grenadiers, and automatic rifles into small groups. (USMCHD 2110)

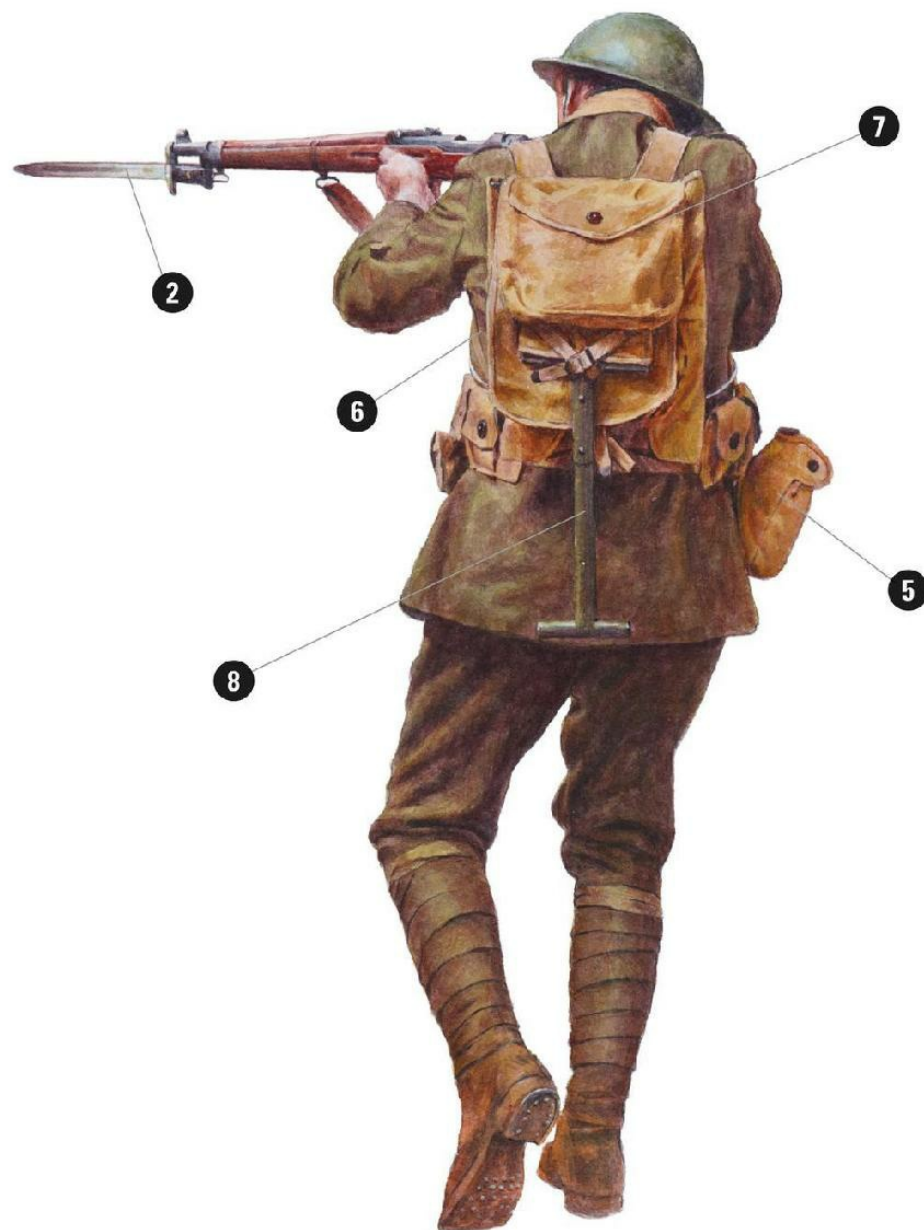


A French 37mm Hotchkiss trench gun manned by American troops. Developed by the French to give infantry a direct-fire support weapon to use against machine-gun positions and fortifications, this gun was a precursor to the rocket-propelled grenades and infantry-carried rockets and missiles found in today's armies. There were six 3in Stokes trench mortars and three 37mm trench guns per US infantry regiment. These were parceled out to battalions as the regimental commander saw fit. This created situations where trench mortars and trench guns could be unavailable when a battalion needed their support, and could disperse the weapons, thereby eliminating the option to concentrate them to support one battalion. (Photo by © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)



Marines went to France wearing their forest-green prewar uniforms. By spring and early summer 1918 these had worn out and were being replaced with the standard AEF uniform worn by this Marine. Having been issued new uniforms during the previous week, the 3/5th Marines had just

returned to the front line.



Weapons, dress and equipment

This Marine is advancing in “light order” for combat, therefore he is not carrying a bedroll or greatcoat/overcoat. He is armed with the M1903 Springfield rifle (1), a .30-caliber bolt-action weapon that used a five-round magazine. The M1903 weighed 8.69lb and was 43.2in long without a bayonet; with the 20in M1905 bayonet attached (2) it weighed 9.69lb.

On his chest is the haversack (3) for the British gasmask and Small Box Respirator. The gasmask had a head cover with plastic eyepieces, that connected by a hose to the box-like air filter which contained granules of charcoal and other chemicals which absorbed the chlorine and phosgene gases and allowed cleaned air to pass. The mask provided some protection from inhalation and eye exposure to mustard gas, but any exposed skin would be affected by contact.

He wears the Army's M1910 webbing (4); its cartridge belt had ten pouches, each holding two five-round clips for his rifle. His water bottle (5), or canteen, is attached to the belt on his right hip. The bayonet holder (6) is attached to the webbing on his left back. The pack (7), or knapsack, is lightly loaded with emergency rations, and probably a few personal items he wants with him at all times. The entrenching tool (8) is attached to the pack, ready for digging in on a captured objective. He is wearing a British-style M1917 steel helmet (9), the standard helmet of the AEF. His boots (10) are M1917/1918 Army 4.5in-high ankle boots.

German

The German infantryman's weapon was the 7.92mm Mauser Gewehr 98 bolt-action rifle with a five-round magazine. German rifle grenades in 1918 used a discharger cup attached to a Gewehr 98 and propelled by the standard rifle round. Weighing 11lb, the grenade was cylindrical, with a central bore to allow the rifle bullet to pass through. Range of the rifle grenade was 200–210yd. Hand grenades were of two types: the stick grenade, which was a cylindrical grenade with a handle and weighed 1.3lb; and the egg grenade, which was the size and shape of a chicken egg and weighed 11oz.

German infantry tactics were based on extensive use of machine guns. The two principal machine guns were based on the same design, the Maschinengewehr 08 (MG 08), a tripod-mounted heavy machine gun. The *Maschinengewehr-Kompagnie* in a German battalion was issued 12 MG 08s. Its little brother was the MG 08/15, simply a bipod-mounted lighter version with a rifle butt.

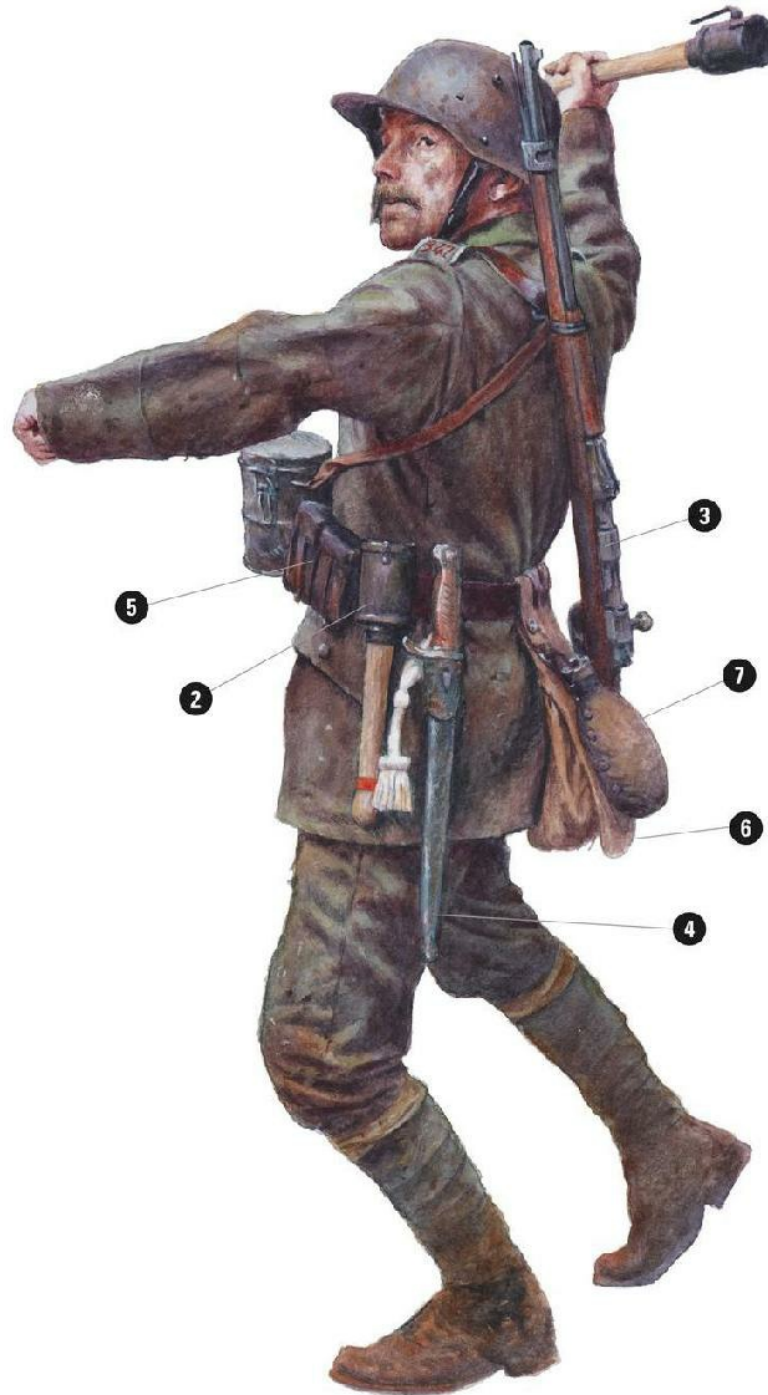


The 7.92mm Mauser Gewehr 98 with standard sights had an aimed range of 550yd; with optical telescopic sights, as shown here, the range was 870yd. The first combat use of the Gewehr 98 was during the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1901) and it continued in use by German infantry until the end of World War II. Years of trench warfare had led European high commands to view machine guns and artillery as the primary killing machines. This led to a decline in the quality of marksmanship in all armies on the Western Front when compared to the US insistence on extensive rifle training. (NRA Museums, NRAmuseums.com)

An infantry battalion included four 7.58cm light trench mortars, called *Minenwerfer*, and eight grenade throwers, or *Granatwerfer*. The *Minenwerfer* was a rifled muzzleloader that weighed 325lb, required a five-man crew, and fired a 10lb shell with an effective range of approximately 330yd. The maximum firing range was roughly 1,400yd. The *Granatwerfer* weighed 79lb with its base plate, had a two-man crew, and fired a grenade containing 14oz of high explosive to a range of 330yd.



The German heavy machine gun was the water-cooled Maschinengewehr 08 (MG 08) firing 7.92mm rounds at 500–600rd/min, but changing the 250-round belts reduced this rate of fire. Its effective range was 2,185yd and its weight with cooling water was approximately 152lb. (USNPS Photo, Springfield Armory National Historic Site, SPAR 788)



The German command rated their 87. Infanterie-Division as a trench division. It was less well equipped than the higher-rated units and its men had to wear their uniforms and use equipment for a longer period. As with all German units, defense was based on machine guns and prompt counterattacks. In the confines of trench warfare, hand grenades had become an important weapon.



Weapons, dress and equipment

This German infantryman is part of the local reserves sent to counterattack the Marines and restore the defense. He has left his backpack behind and is carrying his weapons and minimal personal equipment. He is throwing a stick hand grenade (1) and has more attached to his belt (2). His 7.92mm Mauser Gewehr 98 bolt-action rifle (3) is slung across his back and his bayonet is still carried in the bayonet scabbard (4). The bayonet scabbard is attached to his cartridge belt, which has six cartridge pouches (5), each holding 20 rounds for his rifle. Also attached to the belt are his canvas bread bag (6) and a water bottle (7). Hanging from straps in front is his gasmask inside its cylindrical canister (8). The mask was a hood with eyepieces that

used a breathing tube connected to the canister, which contained a charcoal or other chemical filter.

This infantryman is wearing a worn M1915 *Bluse* (9) with the number “347” on the shoulder straps identifying his regiment. His helmet (10) is the M1916 standard “coal scuttle” which does not have a camouflage covering.

GAS WARFARE

Both the Allies and the Germans had developed chemical weapons such as gas shells fired by artillery or trench mortars, and gas-cloud release devices. In 1918 the primary chemicals used were chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gases. Chlorine and phosgene caused asphyxiation which, if inhaled in sufficient dosage, suffocated a victim. Although simple gasmasks protected troops from the effects, wearing such masks restricted the soldiers' breathing and fields of view, resulting in reduced performance in combat. Mustard gas was a persistent threat because it would form an oily coating on surfaces with which it came into contact and not dissipate into the air as did chlorine and phosgene. Causing blisters when it came into contact with human skin and blindness if it contacted eyes, mustard gas polluted its target areas for days to weeks and was as much a threat to attackers as to defenders. Frequently, mustard gas would be used to deny easy movement to the enemy in areas that were adjacent to areas being attacked. Despite being the leaders in the use of mustard gas, the Germans had no more protection from it than did their enemies.



Captured German machine guns, such as this MG 08/15 light variant, were used by the Marines whenever they were in working order and ammunition was found. In 1918 each German infantry company was allocated six light machine guns. This number was not always attained, especially within position divisions. Guns taken by the Marines on June 11 and 12 were quickly incorporated into defensive positions, adding greatly to the Marines' firepower. (USMCHD, no number)

In June 1918 the Germans relied on artillery to deliver gas. They mixed gas shells with high explosive: 80 percent gas and 20 percent high explosive for counter-battery and long-range bombardment, 40 percent gas and 60 percent high explosive to support attacking infantry, and 70 percent gas and 30 percent high explosive to inhibit enemy movements. At Belleau Wood the Germans were beginning to ration their chemical shells and only one intense gas attack occurred between June 5 and June 25; starting at midnight June 13, roughly 7,000 mustard shells saturated the southern part of Belleau Wood, Lucy-le-Bocage, and adjacent fields. Despite German chemical shell rationing, the US 2nd Division reported only four days without gas being present at Belleau Wood.



Each German infantry battalion was allocated four 7.58cm light trench mortars (*Minenwerfer*). Crews for these were provided from the infantry. These weapons had a gas shell that held 1¾lb of chemical liquid. In the fixed trench lines the short-range *Minenwerfer* was used to deliver gas shells into the front areas of the enemy's trench lines. Given the small weight of the shells, and the limited number of *Minenwerfer* per battalion, their use for delivering gas was more often for harassment purposes rather than effect. At Belleau Wood there were no reports of *Minenwerfer* being used for gas attacks. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

During the fighting around Belleau Wood, the 2nd Division's artillery fired few gas shells. This was a result of the division being within a French corps. The French appear to have issued gas shells to their artillery, perhaps feeling that the shells were better employed by batteries with experience of using gas. This meant Allied gas was used primarily for counter-battery and rear-area bombardments by corps-level artillery. Gas was not used to support the Marine attacks into Belleau Wood.



American troops form up for a gasmask-fitting inspection behind the lines. The proper fit of a gasmask is crucial to protect the wearer. Poorly fitted, loose masks allow gas to enter between the skin and mask, thus exposing the wearer to the gas. Prior to Belleau Wood, many Marines and US soldiers failed to take gas training and protection as seriously as they should have. This could result in heavy

casualties when a unit came under a German gas attack for the first time, as happened when the 2/6th Marines suffered 475 gas casualties during the night of June 13/14. (Photo by Library of Congress/Corbis/VCG via Getty Images)

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS

USMC

The cumbersome platoon organization adopted by the AEF resulted in a two half-platoon organization that complicated command and control. The platoon leader either advanced with his leading half-platoon, or stayed back with the supporting half-platoon. Either method meant that he soon lost control. He either became embroiled in the leading half-platoon and lost contact with the support, or he left the front-line half-platoon leader on his own to control the developing fight. A company commander had to stay behind the line to try to coordinate the actions of his large platoons. Many times the chaos of combat meant that the company commander's role became one of merely ordering the second-echelon platoons forward and either becoming a spectator or moving up to try to push stragglers forward or take charge of leaderless groups of his men and get them into the fight. Leading meant being at the front line, showing oneself to the troops, and consequently being exposed to enemy fire. It often fell to NCOs, sometimes to privates, to lead small groups against the enemy, take or hold ground, and create the patchwork of innumerable small actions that are what real battles consist of. Because of the number of prewar veteran Marines and the high percentage of college-educated men who were willing to take charge when needed, the 4th Marine Brigade held a qualitative small-unit leadership advantage over the rest of the AEF in combat.



Brigadier General James G. Harbord, US Army, had been General John J. Pershing's Chief of Staff until Pershing assigned him the 4th Marine Brigade, calling it the finest body of troops in France. Harbord earned the Marines' respect despite being initially perceived as an Army interloper. (USMCHD, no number)

Tactical radios did not exist in 1918. Field telephones were extensively used, but their wires were prone to be cut by artillery fire, vehicles, animals, and men. Telephones were more useful in defense than offense since their use required unrolling the telephone wires under fire while advancing. In combat, communications within the battalion relied on runners. A Marine battalion headquarters was allocated 16 runners, and each rifle platoon had four runners. At full strength there were 80 runners

within a battalion. Casualties among runners, who had to move through hostile direct fire and artillery barrages, were considerable. Deaths or wounds among runners frequently meant that information and orders did not arrive at their intended location.



The Marines' success in Belleau Wood would depend on junior leaders. From left to right are four Marine generals who distinguished themselves in the battle as junior leaders: Major General William Worton, Lieutenant General Gerald C. Thomas, General Lemuel C. Shepherd, and Lieutenant General Alfred H. Noble. While all armies' junior officers suffered high casualties, the AEF junior officers initially suffered more so as they frequently followed the example set by officers during the American Civil War – which on a 1918 battlefield was a recipe for becoming an early casualty. (USMCHD, A406033)

German

The junior-level leadership in the German Army battalions of 1918 was provided by combat veterans. In 1918 officer losses and the demand to staff the expanded wartime Army meant that regiments would frequently be commanded by a major in place of a colonel, a battalion by a captain, a company by a lieutenant, and a platoon by a temporary officer or a senior NCO.



Portrait of an unknown German officer. Blooded by years of experience, German junior officers and NCO equivalents had a well-established and proven doctrine for squad, platoon, company, and battalion actions. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

From 1914 to 1917 the German Army developed battlefield communications for trench warfare to the limits allowed by the existing technology. Each infantry regiment included a signals detachment with one officer and 130 men organized into detachments for telephones, signal lamps, carrier pigeons, and messenger dogs. Trench warfare allowed careful placement and protection of telephone wires, preselecting of routes to be used by messenger runners and dogs, signal rockets (frequently used to call for artillery support), and short-range (less than 2,000yd) powered buzzers. The offensives of 1918 resulted in many units being forced to change from defensive trench warfare to mobile warfare using hastily prepared positions. For German units at Belleau Wood, this meant that they now had to rely heavily on messenger runners to cross terrain about which they had little knowledge and field telephones with wires strung along the ground unprotected from men, animals, vehicles, and shell fire. With runners losing their directions or being killed or wounded and telephone

wires more prone to being cut, connectivity and speed of German communications slowed and trench-specific communications equipment and techniques became nearly useless. Headquarters' reactions to enemy attacks and movements were slowed, as it took longer for information to flow up the chain of command, and orders to flow down.



With radios in their infancy, field telephones were a critical means of rapid communications. Unfortunately, telephone wires were easily cut by enemy artillery fire and friendly vehicle and troop movements. The difficulty of laying telephone wire in the front lines meant that infantry platoons, companies, and battalions relied on soldiers to carry written and verbal messages in combat. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

LOGISTICS AND MORALE

Germany's 7. Armee had moved its supplies forward from rail heads behind its May 27 front lines. Its advance resulted in lengthened supply lines traveling over roads and bridges destroyed or damaged during the fighting. Possessing limited motor transport, the Germans used large numbers of draught animals which required more pounds of fodder per ton of supply moved than motor transports required in fuel. The voracious consumption of shells and bullets meant supply officers had to reduce the amount of fodder sent forward, resulting in undernourished and weakened draught animals. Weakened animals carried smaller loads and were susceptible to sickness and death, which reduced

supplies available to the front-line troops. At Belleau Wood, the Germans suffered food shortages and were unable to replace worn-out and damaged equipment; artillery shells were rationed, especially chemical shells.

For the Americans the French retreat had shortened supply lines and brought the front closer to railroads, depots, and factories. The Allies, with greater resources to build, fuel, and operate trucks, used them en masse by 1918. Although large numbers of animals were still used (an AEF division had 6,638 horses), trucks provided the key means of moving supplies forward from rail heads (an AEF division had 577 motor trucks). There were no supply shortages at Belleau Wood for the Marines. The capacity of the Allies' supply system was highlighted by the re-equipping of Marine battalions with new uniforms during the battle, prompt replacement of lost and damaged weapons, and an abundant supply of small-arms ammunition and artillery shells.



Equipped with French 75mm guns, the 12th Field Artillery Regiment normally supported the 4th Marine Brigade. On the Western Front one's own artillery had to neutralize the enemy's artillery, destroy and disrupt enemy defensive positions, and support advancing infantry by suppressing enemy machine-gunners and riflemen. This last mission resulted in the walking, or rolling, barrage. This was an artillery bombardment of the enemy's infantry defensive positions timed to move forward in distance as the infantry advanced. Because of the limits of battlefield communications in 1918 that used runners and field telephones, success required a barrage and advancing infantry to operate on a rigid timetable. Deviation from the walking barrage's timetable could have terrible consequences: if the infantry advanced too fast they could come under their own artillery fire; but if they advanced too slowly (or the barrage moved too fast) the enemy could recover from the bombardment and be manning their defenses, ready to meet the attackers with devastating machine-gun fire.

(USMCHD, 35-MM-522113)

Both Marines and German infantrymen started the fighting with high morale. The fresh, enthusiastic USMC volunteers saw themselves as a separate breed from the AEF conscripts. Infused with the Old

Corps ethos by the long-service officers and NCOs who trained them, the Marines went into combat determined to fight and win. Two German reports summarize the impression that captured Marines gave German commands. First, the War Diary of 28. Infanterie-Division: “they consider their membership in the Marine Corps as something of an honor. They proudly resent any attempts to place their Regiments on par with other Infantry Regiments; call themselves ‘Soldiers of the Land and Sea’ and are well informed as far as the glorious history of their Regiments during the period of the Revolutionary War is concerned” (quoted in Asprey 1996: 296–97). Second, IV. Reservekorps on June 16, 1918: “The various attacks by both Marine Regiments were carried out with vigor and without consideration of losses. The moral effect of our firearms did not materially check the advance of the infantry. The nerve of the Americans is still unshaken” (quoted in US Army 1989: 607).



Most artillery was horse-drawn in 1918. The German advances during their 1918 attacks were slowed down by the difficulties of moving artillery and supplies forward over the devastated and shelled terrain. With artillery falling behind the infantry, Allied troops could more easily delay the enemy and buy the time needed for fresh reserves to form solid defensive lines. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

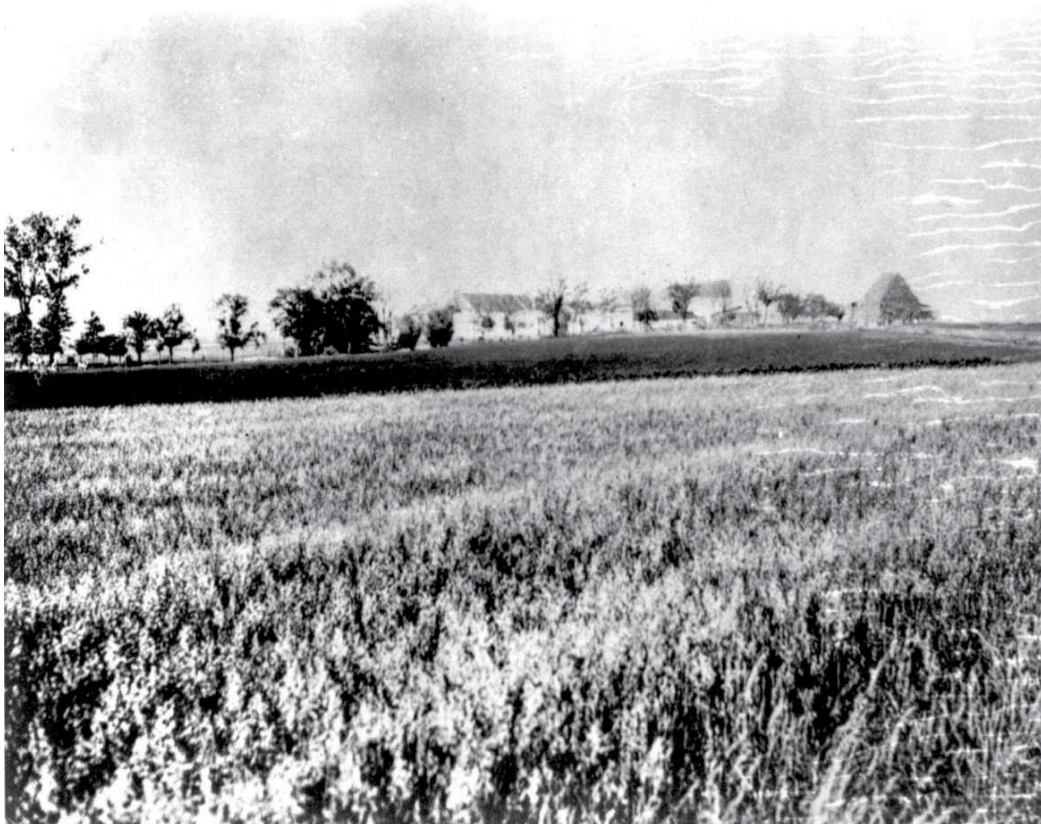
The AEF General Staff Intelligence Section rated the German divisions that fought at Belleau Wood at the end of the war. These ratings were: 10. Infanterie-Division, first class; 28. Infanterie-Division, second class; and 87., 197., and 237. Infanterie-Divisionen, fourth class. The AEF determined that 237. Infanterie-Division had high morale during the spring 1918 offensives and fought well; as the summer of 1918 progressed, however, the division’s morale and performance was observed to deteriorate rapidly.

The 4th Marine Brigade's First Attack

June 6, 1918

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

On June 1, advance elements of the 2d Division's infantry began arriving near the town of Château-Thierry; the division was being sent into action to help stop the German offensive, now 35 miles from Paris. Over the next three days the rest of the division was brought forward and on June 4 it assumed command of a sector under the 21e Corps d'armée. The situation was initially confused, with exhausted French troops of the 43e and 164e Divisions d'infanterie conducting a fighting retreat to the front of the 2d Division which had become a support line. News that American troops were behind them, ready to fight, lifted the morale of the French soldiers of the 43e Division d'infanterie. On June 3, this division delivered several local counterattacks against the advancing 197. Infanterie-Division of IV. Reservekorps. Although the French attacks were repulsed, the unexpected French aggressiveness was disconcerting to the Germans, who now proceeded with more caution.



Les Mares farm near Belleau Wood was as close to Paris as the Germans got during Operation *Blücher*. Here, on June 3, the 55th Company stopped the enemy with long-range rifle and machine-gun fire. (USMCHD, 44B-529185)

Dan Daly

The US Marine Corps has always emphasized the need for, and respected the role of, non-commissioned officers. These individuals provide a critical component of small-unit infantry leadership. Sergeant Daniel Joseph “Dan” Daly, recipient of two Medals of Honor, epitomizes the Marine NCOs at Belleau Wood and throughout the Corps’ history.

Dan Daly enlisted in the US Marine Corps January 10, 1899. The Spanish–American War ended before Daly’s training finished, but he would see plenty of fighting before World War I. In 1900 he was in China, fighting during the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1901). Daly was awarded his first Medal of Honor for defending his position by himself against repeated Boxer attacks. He earned his second Medal of Honor in Haiti. On October 24, 1915, Daly was leading a squad of Marines, part of a 40-man detachment which was ambushed by a force of approximately 400 insurgents (referred to as bandits in many reports).

On June 6, 1918, Daly was the First Sergeant of the 73rd Machine Gun Company, attached to the 3/6th Marines. As the attack began, Daly was reported to have yelled “Come on, you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?” and led his men forward into the enemy. Daly later claimed that he actually said “For Christ’s sake men – come on! Do you want to live forever?” Although Daly was recommended for a third Medal of Honor for his actions at Belleau Wood, someone higher up decided against awarding a third medal to the same person and he instead received the Navy Cross. Regardless of Dan Daly’s actual words, the phrase “Come on, you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?” is carved in stone next to Daly’s name at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Virginia.

The afternoon of June 3 saw the first encounter between Marine riflemen and German infantry, around Les Mares farm. At 1700hrs elements of 197. Infanterie-Division, having forced the French to retreat, ran into the 55th Company of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines (2/5th Marines). Marine marksmanship training resulted in the attack being shot to pieces at ranges as great as 550yd. For most Germans, this was a new experience; this type of accurate rifle fire had not been seen since 1914 when the regular troops of the British Army cut down German attackers from Mons to Ypres.



A German infantryman, equipped and ready to march. After the artillery barrage ceased, the “poor bloody infantry” had to close with the enemy across the last hundred yards and evict them from positions. Without a solid body of infantry neither attack nor defense could succeed. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

The *Blücher* offensive had created a large salient in the French lines. IV. Reservekorps (also

known as *Gruppe Conta*) was at the tip of the salient; the shoulders had held allowing French reserves to establish solid defensive lines on its western and eastern sides. Continuing to expand the depth of the salient was not sound strategy. At midnight on June 3, IV. Reservekorps issued orders to its divisions instructing them to attack in order to gain a defensible line and protect the flank of 7. Armee. Although IV. Reservekorps was not driving toward Paris along the Metz–Paris road, the Allies viewed this corps as a grave threat to Paris.

As the German advance slowed, the fresh 167e Division d'infanterie relieved the battered 43e on the left of the 2d Division and on its right the 10e Division d'infanterie coloniale dug in. These French troops increased the resistance and were duly noted by the Germans. On June 5, IV. Reservekorps issued orders canceling attacks until further notice. Both sides spent most of June 4 and 5 preparing defenses and sorting out units which had become intermingled during the previous days.

With the front appearing to be stabilized, 21e Corps d'armée decided to launch a local counterattack. The first attack on the morning of June 6 was conducted primarily by the 167e Division d'infanterie with a supporting attack by the 1/5th Marines to clear a hill on the French right flank. This early-morning effort was successful and the 21e Corps d'armée issued orders at noon to the 2d Division to seize Belleau Wood and Bouresches village and occupy the high ground overlooking the Clignon. These objectives were assigned to the 4th Marine Brigade, commanded by Army Brigadier General James G. Harbord.

4th Marine Brigade Field Order No. 2, issued at 1405hrs, June 6, said that the brigade would attack toward a line from Torcey (northwest of Belleau Wood) to Bouresches (southeast of the wood). The first phase of the attack required the capture of Belleau Wood. Attacking the wood from the southwest was the mission of the 3/5th Marines (less one company), commanded by Major Benjamin Berry, and the 3/6th Marines, commanded by Major Berton Sibley. The 2/6th Marines, commanded by Major Thomas Holcomb, was ordered to advance their left in conformity with the advance of the 3/6th Marines and take Bouresches. Colonel Albertus Catlin, commander of the 6th Marine Regiment, was in charge of the three attacking battalions. The attack's start time was set for 1700hrs.

Hans Bischoff

The task of defending Belleau Wood on June 6, 1918 fell to Infanterie-Regiment 461, commanded by 46-year-old Major Hans Otto Bischoff. It was the “luck of the draw” that Belleau Wood fell in 237. Infanterie-Division’s sector and that the division assigned Bischoff’s regiment to hold it. This resulted in a veteran bush fighter being responsible for defending the wood.

Major Bischoff was a veteran of Germany’s West African colonial forces and bush and forest warfare. To him, Belleau Wood was a natural fortification. Accounting for the terrain and vegetation, he set up lines taking advantage of natural features and exploiting fields of fire an attacker would have to cross to reach the wood. Because of the tangled nature of the undergrowth he only established outposts in the southwest corner and set his main line of resistance running through the wood just north of Hill 181 to the southeastern corner overlooking Bouresches. These defenses did not conform to 1918 German doctrine; instead, he placed most troops forward, because experience had taught him that in thick woods a counterattack in the doctrinal manner would become disorganized and scattered before contacting the enemy.

When defense of the wood was split between 237. Infanterie-Division and 28. Infanterie-Division, Bischoff forcefully protested the latter’s defensive deployment which followed German doctrine. He warned that if the Marines got into the wood, 28. Infanterie-Division would be unable to hold its area. He was finally silenced by IV. Reservekorps’ approval of 28. Infanterie-Division’s dispositions. Bischoff promptly had his regiment begin digging switch lines to prevent his position from being outflanked if his neighboring unit failed to hold.

Defending Belleau Wood was Infanterie-Regiment 461 (237. Infanterie-Division), with two battalions deployed in the wood and one battalion in reserve. Infanterie-Regiment 461 was commanded by Major Hans Otto Bischoff, a veteran of Germany's West African colonial forces and an experienced bush and forest fighter. Seeing that the wood was a natural fortification, he organized the defenses to run from the northwest corner of the wood along the western face to Hill 181, then from the hill, through the wood to the southeastern corner opposite Bouresches. The southern and southwestern edges were occupied by outposts, some with MG 08/15 light machine guns. Three separate lines were constructed and dug in with barbed wire placed in their front. Bischoff's reserve battalion (I./IR 461) was in the northern part of the wood. Bouresches was held by two companies of Infanterie-Regiment 398 (10. Infanterie-Division), whose main line of resistance ran along the rail line north of that village.

The 4th Marine Brigade's first attack, June 6, 1918

MAP KEY

- 1 1700hrs:** The 3/5th Marines attacks Belleau Wood with three companies (45th, 20th, and 47th) in line across open wheat fields toward the center of the wood.
- 2 1700hrs:** The 3/6th Marines' 82d Company, followed by the 83d Company, enters the southern "dog leg" and clears outposts of Infanterie-Regiment 461 while the 84th Company, followed by the 97th Company, advances in clear terrain immediately south of the wood.
- 3 1700hrs:** The 96th Company (2/6th Marines) attacks towards Bouresches and encounters heavy fire, disrupting its formation and pinning down most of the men.
- 4 c. 1715hrs:** The 3/5th Marines encounters massed enemy machine-gun fire and halts. Some Marines of the 47th Company move to the south and enter the wood, joining up with the 82d and 83d companies.
- 5 c. 1730hrs:** The 84th and 97th companies come under fire of Infanterie-Regiment 461's machine guns and are pinned down. Both companies move into the southern edge of the wood, reducing their exposure.
- 6 1800hrs:** Elements of the 96th Company enter Bouresches and clear it of elements of Infanterie-Regiment 398. They are joined by more Marines using the ravine of a creek bed as a covered approach. By midnight the village is held by 600 Marines.
- 7 1810hrs:** Elements of the 3/5th Marines withdraw to their starting positions.
- 8 2045hrs:** The 3/6th Marines, in the southern part of Belleau Wood, advances up to Infanterie-Regiment 461's main line of resistance and comes to a halt, unable to advance farther.

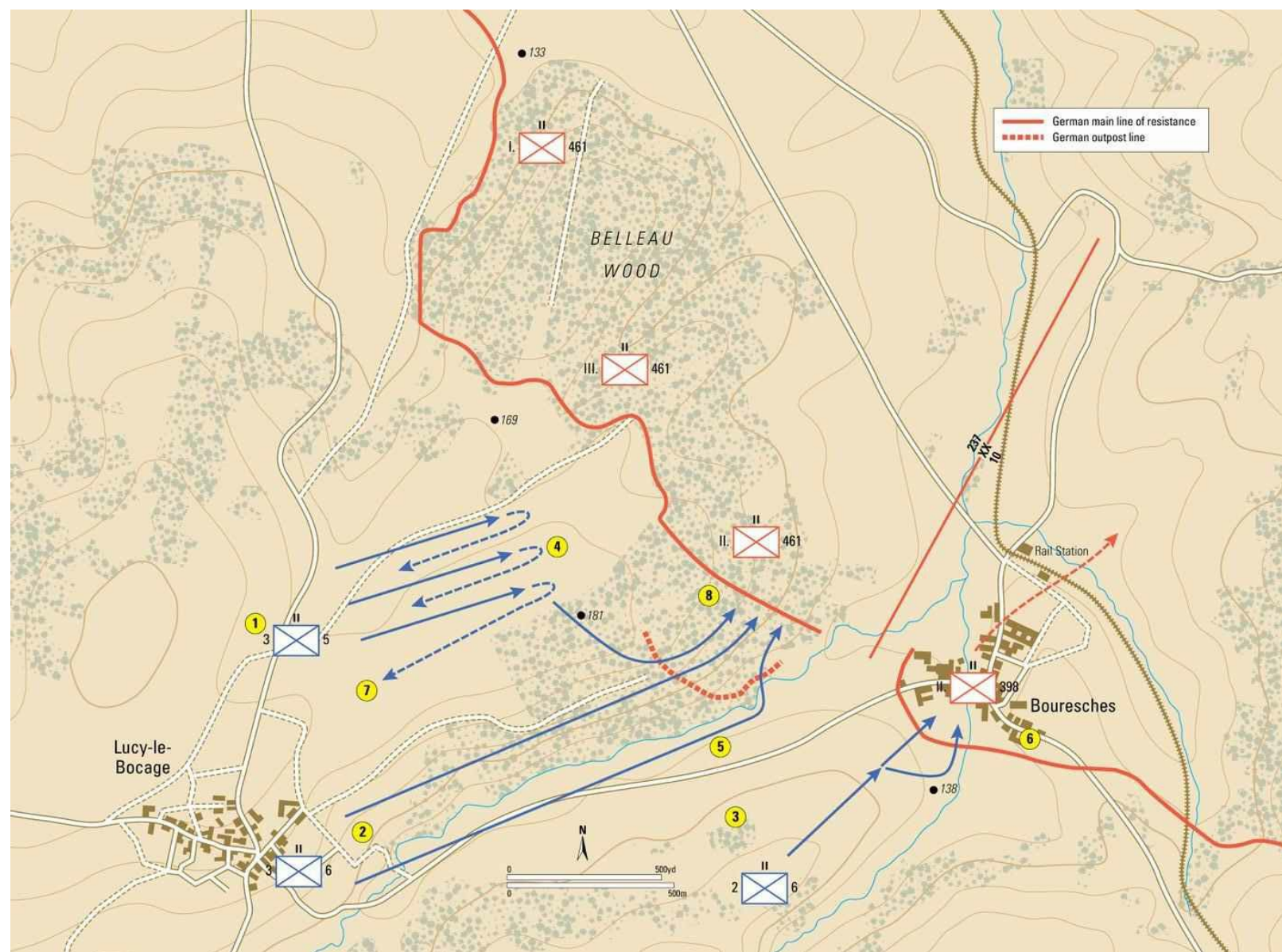
Battlefield environment

Belleau Wood was roughly 550yd south of Belleau village and on higher ground than the surrounding wheat fields. The wood was almost 1.25 miles long (north to south) and about 1,100yd at its widest and 435yd at its narrowest. The wood's high point was Hill 181 in the southwestern corner, covered in impenetrable second growth that offered no field of fire for defensive positions; nor was it a suitable location for an observation post. The surrounding

wheat fields were waist to chest high in June. Attacking Belleau Wood required the Marines to approach across open ground from either the west or south, with only the slight undulations of the ground to provide cover, and then only when lying prone. The southwestern leg toward Lucy-le-Bocage offered the shortest distance to cross before entering the wood. The terrain here was difficult to traverse as it featured trees, thick underbrush, giant boulders, and unmapped ravines and rises. The southern edge of the wood rapidly rose above the open ground and dominated any movements between Lucy-le-Bocage and Bouresches.



Belleau Wood rose above the surrounding ground. Its higher elevation and wooded cover made it a key terrain feature in the German defense line. For the Americans, its capture provided a stronger defense line and allowed flanking units to advance.
(USMCD, 4971)



INTO COMBAT

According to Catlin,

The orders to attack at 5 o'clock were written at Brigade Headquarters, about three kilometers [1.9 miles] in the rear, at 2 P.M. At 3.45 a copy was handed to me by Lieutenant Williams, General Harbord's aide, who came up by motorcycle.

I was supposed to direct Berry's movements, though he had also received the orders from his own Regimental Headquarters ... but his battalion was beyond reach and he himself was in the woods to their rear, a mile away. It had been impossible on account of the heavy shelling, to run a telephone line out to him. I sent runners, but I was sure that they couldn't reach him before the attack would have to be made ... I was fully aware of the difficulties of the situation. Especially for Berry. He had 400 yards of open wheat field to cross ... (Catlin 2013: 90)

The 4th Marine Brigade's attack was hastily planned and lacked proper artillery support. Artillery blindly shelled Belleau Wood for 30 minutes prior to the attack without any known targets. A rolling barrage, as the French doctrine used by the AEF called for to support an infantry attack, was not provided for the Marines. After the war, Brigadier General Harbord stated that the information upon which the plan was based said that Belleau Wood was not occupied by the Germans and the intent of the attack was to take the wood by surprise. The 2d Division's operations report for June 4 included the following, however: "A patrol of one officer and two men of the 6th Marines, sent from LUCY-le-BOCAGE at 9 p. m., found the Bois de BELLEAU and the high ground south of TORCY occupied by

Germans” (US Army 1989: 146).

Contradicting the claim of a surprise attack, the 2d Field Artillery Brigade’s order for supporting the June 6 attacks read as follows: “PREPARATION OF THE ATTACK: On the receipt of this order, the artillery will make ... interdiction and harassing fires in the zone to be attacked, and destruction fires on the points where it is possible that there are nests of machine guns” (US Army 1989: 363). The three Marine battalions were sent unsupported into a hurricane of unsuppressed machine-gun fire.

The 3/5th Marines was deployed approximately 1,100yd north of Lucy-le-Bocage behind a low ridge. Being short one company (the 16th Company had been detached), the battalion had three companies in line: the 45th to the north, the 20th in the center, and the 47th to the south. Each of these companies held one platoon back in reserve. The attack was aimed at the crescent-shaped western edge of Belleau Wood. Between their position and Belleau Wood the ground was mainly wheat fields and was enfiladed from the north by Infanterie-Regiment 461’s positions around Hill 169 and from the south by positions that followed the western curve of the wood. There was no cover other than small depressions in the wheat fields.

The attacking companies formed according to French doctrine, each platoon in four waves. As the ineffective shelling of the wood ceased, the platoon leaders blew their whistles, and the advance started. Immediately, as the Marines moved into the open, the Germans opened up with a deadly fusillade of machine-gun fire from their positions. Watching the attack was Floyd Gibbons, war correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper. He described the attack by the 3/5th Marines:

Owing to the difficulty of liaison in the thickets of the wood, and because of the almost impossible task of directing it in conjunction with the advancing lines, the artillery preparation for the attack was necessarily brief. At five o’clock to the dot the Marines moved out from the woods in perfect order, and started across the wheat fields in four long waves. It was a beautiful sight, these men of ours going across those flat fields toward the tree clusters beyond from which the Germans poured a murderous machine gun fire. (Gibbons 1918: 294)

The 3/5th Marines faced overwhelming fire trying to cross the open fields west of the northern half of Belleau Wood. Fire was coming from three directions and the attack quickly collapsed. Sergeant Merwin Silverthorn of the 45th Company recalled his company’s cautious progress toward Belleau Wood; with bayonets fixed the Americans held their fire, mindful of the need to avoid moving into the artillery barrage. According to Silverthorn, after 75yd only six men – less than 15 percent of his platoon – were still advancing, with the rest having taken cover or been hit (Clark 2013: 160).



The 3/5th Marines' June 6 attack crossed open wheat fields such as this to reach Belleau Wood. Advancing without support of a rolling artillery barrage exposed the battalion to German machine-gunners who had probably never imagined such easy targets. (USMCHD, no number)

Soon after the attack started, Major Berry reported to Colonel Wendell Neville, commander of the 5th Marine Regiment: "Following information is all available re position companies. 2 platoons 47th Co. reformed and attempting to protect left flank of adjoining organization on right. 20th Co. reforming on similar mission. Nine men only reported returned of 3 platoons of 45th that went over the top" (quoted in Clark 2015: 139). With little information available, Major Berry decided to go forward to see for himself the situation of his front line. He was accompanied by Gibbons, who recorded what happened:

At different times during the advance runners had come through the woods inquiring for Major John [*sic* – actually Benjamin] Berry, the battalion commander. One of these runners attached himself to Lieutenant [Oscar] Hartzell and myself and together the three of us located the Major coming through the woods. He granted permission for Lieutenant Hartzell and me to accompany him and we started forward, in all a party of some fifteen, including ten runners attached to the battalion commander ...

At the bottom of the slope there was a V-shaped field. The apex of the V was on the left. From left to right the field was some two hundred yards in width. The point where we came out of the woods was about one hundred yards from the apex. At that point the field was about one hundred yards across. It was perfectly flat and was covered with a young crop of oats between ten and fifteen inches high.

This V-shaped oat field was bordered on all sides by dense clusters of trees. In the trees on the side opposite the side on which we stood, were German machine guns. We could hear them. We could not see them but we knew that every leaf and piece of greenery there vibrated from their fire and the tops of the young oats waved and swayed with the streams of lead that swept across.

Major Berry gave orders for us to follow him at intervals of ten or fifteen yards. Then he started across the field alone at the head of the party. I followed. Behind me came Hartzell. Then the woods about us began to rattle fiercely. It was unusually close range. That lead travelled so fast that we could not hear it as it passed. We soon had visual demonstration of the hot place we were in when we began to see the dust puffs that the bullets kicked up in the dirt around our feet.

Major Berry had advanced well beyond the centre of the field when I saw him turn toward me and heard him shout: "Get down everybody."

We all fell on our faces. And then it began to come hot and fast. Perfectly withering volleys of lead swept the tops of the oats just over us. For some reason it did not seem to be coming from the trees hardly a hundred yards in front of us. It was coming from a new direction – from the left.

I was busily engaged flattening myself on the ground. Then I heard a shout in front of me. It came from Major Berry. I lifted my

head cautiously and looked forward. The Major was making an effort to get to his feet. With his right hand he was savagely grasping his left wrist.

I started forward, keeping as flat on the ground as it was possible to do so and at the same time move. As far as was feasible, I pushed forward by digging in with my toes and elbows extended in front of me. It was my object to make as little movement in the oats as possible. I was not mistaken about the intensity of fire that swept the field. It was terrific. (Gibbons 1918: 310–12)

Gibbons himself was soon hit three times, one bullet going through his left eye. In less than an hour the 3/5th Marines attack had been broken; by 1810hrs most of the survivors made their way back to the battalion's starting position. A few personnel of the 3/5th Marines on the right had managed to enter the wood and joined up with the 3/6th Marines. Casualties suffered on June 6 by the 3/5th Marines numbered four officers and 269 men killed and wounded.

For the Germans, defeating the attack was a matter of shooting from prepared positions. Between their machine-gun fire and artillery shelling the ground over which the Marines advanced, it was almost target practice. According to German historian Ernst Otto:



This photograph shows the approximate formation that US Marine Corps half-platoons used on June 6. Several observers remarked on the perfectly formed skirmish lines that moved forward. Some said it looked like a parade ground, until the German machine guns started firing. (USMCHD, H-4922)

The Germans could not have desired better targets; such a spectacle was entirely unfamiliar to them ... However, when one considers that this was their first real fight, this procedure of the Americans is by no means surprising. Troops coming under fire for the first time often proceed in just that way. The German soldiers of 1914, generally conceded to have constituted the best army ever known, often advanced in almost the same way as the Americans did on this occasion, despite orders to the contrary. (Quoted in Amerman 2016: 82)

On the 3/5th Marines' right, or southern, flank Major Sibley's 3/6th Marines attacked at 1700hrs also. This battalion formed up with two companies forward, the 82d and 84th left to right, followed by the 83d and 97th companies. The front was split by the ravine that ran from Lucy-le-Bocage to Bouresches. This ravine followed the axis of the battalion's planned advance. The left wing of the battalion advanced into the southwestern leg of Belleau Wood, while the right wing advanced south of the wood itself. The German main line was over 1,000yd away. Colonel Catlin watched the 3/6th Marines move out:

I watched his men go in and it was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever witnessed. The battalion pivoted on its right, the left sweeping across open ground in four waves, as steadily and correctly as though on parade. There were two companies of them, deployed in four skirmish lines, the men placed five yards apart and the waves fifteen to twenty yards behind each other ...

Well they made it. They reached the woods without breaking. They had the advantage of slightly better cover than Berry's men and the defensive positions at the lower edge of the woods had not been so well organized by the Germans as those on the western side. The first wave reached the low growth at the edge of the woods and plunged in. Then the second wave followed, and the third, and the fourth, and disappeared from view. (Catlin 2013: 93)

Catlin moved forward to observe Sibley's attack from among the supporting machine guns. Here he was exposed to hostile fire. At 1737hrs, as the last of the left wing of the 3/6th Marines was approaching the edge of Belleau Wood, Catlin was struck by a German bullet in the chest and fell to the ground. Wounded, unable to get up, but conscious, he ordered a runner to inform his regimental second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lee, to come up and take charge.

The left wing of the 3/6th Marines quickly entered the wood. The 82d Company moved through the extreme southwestern part of the wood against German outposts. They then advanced up the low incline into the main section of the wood until they encountered German machine-gun fire from the main defense. One of the attackers recalled how he and some others found they had outpaced the advance of the main body; once in the wood, he used his rifle's sights to take aimed shots at a range of 300yd, such fire taking its toll on the defenders (Clark 2013: 163). Because the German line stretched from the northwest to the southeast in this part of the wood, the advancing Marines began to filter to the north and the forward momentum of the attack stalled inside the wood. One platoon of the 83d Company continued straight on and reached the southeast edge of the wood overlooking Bouresches. Lieutenant Louis Timmerman, Jr. led this platoon:

I took my platoon through two thousand yards of hostile woods under heavy fire, capturing some prisoners on the way. Advancing through Bouresches beyond the wood ... I was caught under heavy machine gun fire from points fifty yards to our left and directly in the rear. My men were dropping rapidly. This all happened in a minute or so. I formed line to the rear and charged with the fifteen men still with me. Just inside the edge of the wood I ran into a German group of two machine guns and seventeen men, and captured them; they were abject with fear. Then, my objective still being ahead of me, I advanced in the open and was caught under fire from the flank. ... I gathered in men from different platoons and companies, about thirty-five in all, and consolidated, got a messenger back, and found I was farthest forward. (Quoted in Cowing & Cooper 1919: 184–85)

The right-flank companies of the 3/6th Marines (the 84th in the lead with the 97th following) advanced in the lower-elevation open ground southeast of Belleau Wood toward their objective of Bouresches. As they advanced, they suffered from enfilading machine-gun fire from the German defenses on the higher ground within the wood. Both companies drifted to the slope of the ravine south of the wood which offered some protection from the German fire and went to ground. Here they spent the night under German artillery shelling. The 3/6th Marines' casualties on June 6 were not fully reported. The battalion's history listed at least 17 dead and 135 wounded.

The last Marine battalion in this attack was the 2/6th Marines. The 4th Marine Brigade's orders were for the 2/6th Marines' left flank to conform to the advance of the 3/6th Marines' right flank. Colonel Catlin altered this. He instructed Major Holcomb to have one company move alongside the 3/6th Marines and seize the German positions south of Bouresches. The 96th Company, in reserve, was selected to make the attack and would advance through the 79th Company which would then follow the 96th Company's advance. The 2/6th Marines' commander assembled his four company commanders at 1630hrs and briefed them with the limited information he had. Following this briefing, Captain Donald Duncan, commanding the 96th Company, had 15 minutes to move his company approximately 1 mile and assemble his attack formation. Instructions were brief and hurried,

beginning with the brigade's and extending down to the platoon leaders. The result was confusion such that Lieutenant Clifton Cates, a 96th Company platoon leader, later recalled that he did not know where his objective was.



The south end of Belleau Wood and the road along which the 84th Company advanced. Advancing over open ground, next to a rising wood, the 84th Company suffered heavy losses. (USMCHD, no number)

As the 96th Company advanced, they emerged from cover and saw Bouresches 800yd to the northeast. Again the French attack formation was employed without a rolling barrage. The company attacked without units on its flanks; the 3/6th Marines' starting position was about 1 mile to the left, and no one was advancing on the right. The first 200yd of the advance was peaceful, almost resembling training maneuvers. When the leading waves were 600yd from Bouresches, however, machine guns opened fire supported by defensive artillery firing upon preplanned target areas. One of the first Marines hit was Captain Duncan, and the company went to ground under heavy fire.

The 79th Company followed the 96th Company. After moving about 100yd, the 79th began to suffer casualties and its advance stopped. Both companies lay in open fields under machine-gun and artillery fire, unable to move forward or to retreat as casualties mounted. Despite their losses, small groups of Marines moved forward in short rushes toward Bouresches, and a group of two-dozen Marines from both companies entered the village. They were joined by five more Marines led by Lieutenant Cates who had used the ravine of a creek bed as a covered way to enter the village. Cates recalled encountering especially heavy German fire as his party moved through Bouresches; one round pierced his helmet while another struck his shoulder. With the village mostly cleared of the enemy, Cates divided his 21 remaining men into four parties and distributed them around the area as he awaited the arrival of Captain Zane's 79th Company (Clark 2013: 172). More Marines of the 79th and 96th companies followed Cates' route into Bouresches. Major Sibley (commanding the 3/6th Marines) learned that the 2/6th Marines was in Bouresches and, recognizing the importance of holding the village, sent the right half of his battalion (the 84th and 97th companies) to it.



The open ground that the 96th Company had to cross to reach Bouresches. The company suffered heavily; only a few made it across here. Other Marines found and used the ravine of a creek bed as a covered way to reach the village. (USMCHD 4965)

The German defense of Bouresches was described by Otto as

only an outpost consisting of the *7th* and *8th Companies* of the *398th Regiment*. After a furious house-to-house battle, they were ordered to withdraw to the main defense line to avoid being cut off ... On the German side, too, occurred something generally considered very rare in the war; the infantry, particularly the *1st Battalion 398th*, had almost completely exhausted their ammunition. [Quoted in Amerman 2016: 82–83]

10. Infanterie-Division's War Diary for June 6 contradicted this statement: "At 9 p. m., a second hostile attack was launched which struck the extreme right wing of the 398th Inf. Regt. at BOURESCHES with particular force. Here, the enemy penetrated and forced the withdrawal of the defensive line to the railroad embankment" (quoted in US Army 1989: 569).

On June 6, 1918, the 4th Marine Brigade lost 31 officers and 1,056 men. Of these, six officers and 222 men were killed or died from their wounds. 237. Infanterie-Division listed five officers and 48 men dead, seven officers and 348 men wounded, and one officer and 72 men missing; 10. Infanterie-Division reported 24 killed, 101 wounded, and 26 missing. Although Bouresches was taken by the Marines, Belleau Wood remained firmly under the control of 237. Infanterie-Division.



Lieutenant Clifton B. Cates, 96th Company USMC, led Marines through the ravine into Bouresches and was instrumental in holding the village. Cates remained in the Corps after the war, becoming its 19th Commandant in 1948. (USMCHD, no number)

The ambush of the 84th Company



US view: We see the leading platoon of the 84th Company coming under fire as they advance over open terrain. The wood is green, and has not yet been shattered by heavy artillery shelling. The half-platoon is on the north side of an unimproved dirt road that is being used to guide the advance south of Belleau Wood. Three of the half-platoon's waves, as called for in the modified French doctrine, are visible. The automatic-rifle group forms the leading wave, followed by the smaller rifle-grenadier group and then the riflemen group. Following the riflemen group (but not visible here) is the wave of hand grenadiers. Leading the half-platoon is the platoon leader, imbued with the idea that he is to lead the advance. Participants later reported that the advance was peaceful and seemed more like an exercise until the German machine guns began to fire.



German view: Members of an MG 08 machine-gun team from 2. MGK/IR 461 are firing at the 84th Company in the distance. The Americans are marching across ground 500yd away and approximately 100ft lower than their opponents' positions. The machine-gun team is located in a

small open space among giant boulders within the wood and surrounded by trees in full leaf. Marines have entered the machine gun's fire zone; the crew has just opened fire. The team's ammunition and gun carriers are ready with their Mauser Gewehr 98 rifles to join in the firing, even though German marksmanship at this stage of the war was generally poor. The machine-gun company leaders had waited for more Marines to move into the fields of fire, in order to make the first volleys of fire as effective as possible against the exposed 84th Company.

Breaking into Belleau Wood

June 11–12, 1918

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

The capture of Belleau Wood was considered critical to securing the 2d Division's front and pushing the Germans back to the northern side of Clignon Creek. This meant the Marines would renew the attack, which they did on June 8 with Major Sibley's bloodied 3/6th Marines. The 82d and 83d companies (of the 3/6th Marines) had remained in the southern edge of Belleau Wood following the June 6 attack, while the other two companies were entrenched in Bouresches with elements of the 2/6th Marines. Sibley organized his attack during the night of June 7/8 to use his 82d and 83d companies, reinforced by the 2/6th Marines' 80th Company. His target was the German positions immediately to his north in the wood. The attack started at 0400hrs with the battalion's two companies going forward in four waves. According to Otto, *Infanterie-Regiment 461* reported that the attack was "Beaten back everywhere, he succeeded in penetrating on the left wing, favored as he was by the possession of Bouresches. A counterattack by the *6th* and *8th Companies, 461st*, and the *365th Engineer Company*, threw the Americans back to their original position in the woods" (quoted in Amerman 2016: 84).

After this setback, at 1230hrs the 3/6th Marines was ordered out of Belleau Wood; by 1500hrs the battalion was in a ravine 125yd to the south, allowing the 2d Division's and French artillery to indiscriminately shell the wood. The 3/6th Marines had suffered over 400 casualties since entering the line and was placed in corps reserve to recuperate.

In action since May 27 and considered to be exhausted, 10. *Infanterie-Division* was relieved in the front line during June 7–9 by 28. *Infanterie-Division*. The latter formation was not in much better shape, however; prisoners reported that it had suffered 50 percent casualties prior to entering the Belleau Wood sector. IV. *Reservekorps* adjusted divisional boundaries west by 500yd resulting in 28. *Infanterie-Division* taking over the southern part of Belleau Wood from 237. *Infanterie-Division*. *Infanterie-Regiment 461* had held this section with six companies on the front line supported by heavy machine guns; II./FR 40 (28. *Infanterie-Division*) took over this section of defenses. Major Bischoff, the commander of *Infanterie-Regiment 461*, had been holding his regimental sector with most of his strength on the front line in Belleau Wood; only two rifle companies and two attached engineer companies were held in reserve. According to Otto, learning that *Füsilier-Regiment 40* planned to use just two companies on the main defense line that he had held with six companies, Bischoff "insisted that the customary procedure must be avoided; that the woods were so thick that a counterattack coming from a deep position would be ineffective" (quoted in Amerman 2016: 85). 28. *Infanterie-Division*'s dispositions were already approved by IV. *Reservekorps*. Therefore, the officer who had successfully defended Belleau Wood against the attacks of June 6 and 8 was ignored. Trench-warfare doctrine took precedence over bush-fighting experience.

The 4th Marine Brigade ordered another attack on Belleau Wood for 0430hrs, June 10. The 1/6th Marines was instructed to secure a line running east to west near the wood's center. Artillery had shelled the wood almost continuously since June 6 and the 1/6th Marines reported that the wood

was “mincemeat.” The battalion attacked as scheduled and reported taking its objective by 0800hrs, suffering eight killed and 24 wounded. German reports were that an attack had been made against I./IR 461 and II./FR 40 in the southeastern part of the wood. Comparing both sides’ reports indicates that the 1/6th Marines cleared some German outposts then halted before the German main line of resistance. Basically, the 1/6th Marines had reoccupied positions held by the 3/6th Marines before their withdrawal on June 8. The stage was set for what Otto called “the decisive American attack of 11 June, executed mainly by the 2nd Battalion, 5th [Regiment], and the 1st Battalion, 6th [Regiment]” (quoted in Amerman 2016: 86).



German troops had over a week to perfect their defenses in Belleau Wood, making careful use of the terrain. The trenches on the main line of resistance in 1918 would have been less heavily manned than the ones shown here. (General Photographic Agency/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

The 4th Marine Brigade’s Field Order No. 4, issued at 1745hrs on June 10, ordered an attack on June 11 by the 2/5th Marines. This order assumed that the 1/6th Marines’ line was near the middle of Belleau Wood’s north–south axis. Brigade reported to the 2d Division that the 1/6th Marines had captured the southern half of the wood; in reality, the battalion was just within the southern edge of the wood. The 2/5th Marines was to clear the northern part of the wood, taking Hill 133 at its northern apex overlooking Belleau village; the 1/6th Marines was to advance their left to conform with the 2/5th Marines’ drive so that the final front line would be the eastern side of Belleau Wood after the attack. The brigade’s order called for the 2/5th Marines to attack the northern portion of Belleau Wood, north of Hill 169. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Wise, intended to use woodland to the west to cover the approach and minimize the extent of open ground that would have to be crossed. Only one German company, 2./IR 461, was in position to oppose an attack here. For reasons that remain unclear, the 2/5th Marines did not follow this route. Instead, the battalion attacked Belleau Wood south of Hill 169 across the fields that had been the site of the 3/5th Marines’ costly assault on June 6. In doing so the 2/5th Marines attacked straight into I./IR 461 and II./FR 40.



The interior of Belleau Wood was boulder-strewn and rough. Between boulders, ravines, underbrush, and trees, the Marines' training in marksmanship and bayonet use made success possible. Marines literally stalked German positions, sometimes attacking from their rear. (USMCHD, 519184)

Breaking into Belleau Wood, June 11–12, 1918

MAP KEY

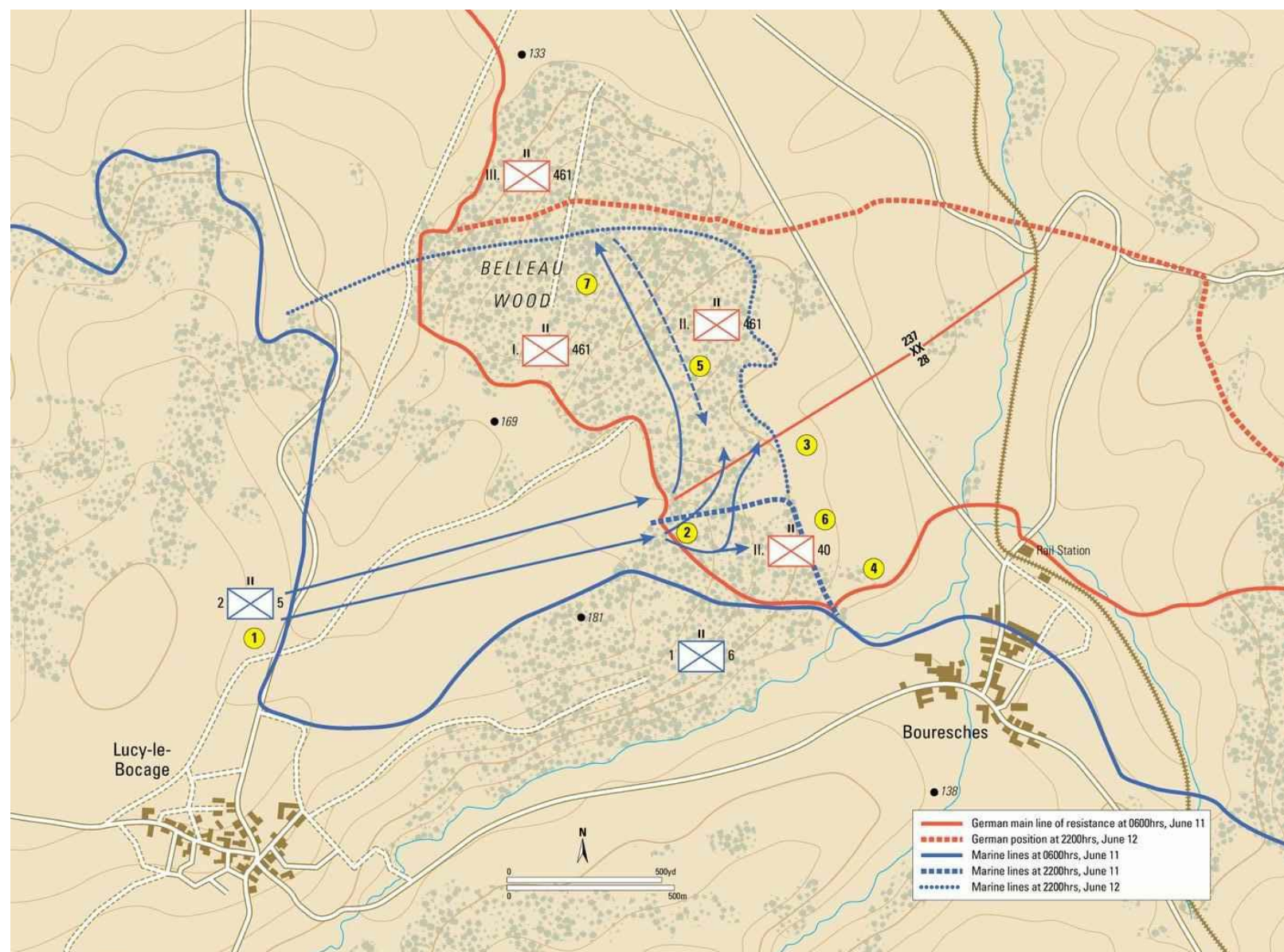
- 1 0430hrs, June 11:** The 2/5th Marines attacks with two companies forward and two following. A heavy ground fog hanging over the open fields prevents the advancing Marines from being seen and the attack takes the Germans by surprise.
- 2 c.0445hrs, June 11:** Elements of the 2/5th Marines penetrate a gap between 237. and 28. Infanterie-Divisionen. This allows Marines to outflank the positions of the two German divisions.
- 3 0611hrs, June 11:** Encountering little opposition, the 43d Company reaches the eastern edge of Belleau Wood.
- 4 1055hrs, June 11:** The 55th Company reports reaching the eastern edge of Belleau Wood overlooking Bouresches.
- 5 1100–1600hrs, June 11:** Scattered groups of Marines advance into the northern portion of the wood. Without formation or command, they withdraw south and join their battalion while survivors of I./IR 461 and III./IR 461 restore a defensive line.
- 6 1200hrs, June 12:** The 55th Company moves from the east face of the wood and extends the north-facing line to the left. Elements of 237. Infanterie-Division stabilize their position within the wood.
- 7 1730hrs, June 12:** The 2/5th Marines attacks north, and establishes a line in the northern third of the wood.

Battlefield environment

The 1/6th Marines was in the extreme southern portion of Belleau Wood. Here the terrain was rough, with giant boulders covered with moss, and split by eons of freezing and thawing. These boulders offered natural protection from shell fire, and provided protected places to site machine-gun positions. All these natural strengths were exploited by the Germans in constructing their defenses. This complex terrain made it next to impossible to maintain formations or advance with any kind of order. Small groups of men had to operate as fire-and-maneuver teams both in the attack and the defense. The 2/5th Marines attack had to cross the open ground west of the wood. Unlike the failed June 6 attack, their approach was hidden from German sentries and observers by an early-morning ground fog, allowing the Marines to cover the distance with few losses. Inside the wood, the Marines found a relatively primitive forest; one thick with tall hardwood trees surrounded by heavy underbrush and second growth. The interior of the wood had a surprising variety of contours not shown on the crude maps the Marines were using. Knolls rose abruptly and enormous boulders thrust up from the ground. Unexpected ravines made movement and communications difficult if not impractical. One could quickly lose sight of one's fellows and become disoriented. Without a compass, only the direction of sunlight and shadows provided a sense of direction. Combat in the wood was a soldiers' battle where the initiative and actions of small groups decided the contest.



Here one sees the tangled undergrowth and trees that Marines had to advance through once inside Belleau Wood. One could literally walk right up to an unseen enemy's trench; this resulted in close-range firefights, with the defender having an advantage. (USMCHD, no number)



INTO COMBAT

Lieutenant Colonel Wise received Field Order No. 4 around 2200hrs, June 10. He had six hours to prepare the 0430hrs attack. He arranged his battalion to attack on a two-company front, with the 43d Company on the left and the 51st Company on the right. Each of the leading companies formed in two waves. Following these were the 18th and 55th companies in half-platoon columns. The plan was to attack from the west, drive through Belleau Wood to its eastern face, turn north, and roll up the enemy line on the western face. The companies were told to drive eastward and lean to their right to contact the 1/6th Marines. To reach the ordered objectives, they had to attack over open ground straight into the German line, achieve a breakthrough, execute a 90-degree change of direction, and continue north through the wood to Hill 133.

At 0330hrs the divisional artillery commenced firing a planned barrage on Belleau Wood. The barrage's plan assumed the 1/6th Marines was holding the southern half of the wood. As a result, the German positions in the southern half of the wood were not shelled.



Marine casualties being carried to an aid station behind the 4th Marine Brigade's lines. Infantry suffered the largest percentage of casualties on the battlefields of World War I and most other wars. The numbers of wounded quickly overwhelmed the available stretcher-bearers. (USMCHD, 012-2059-94)

At 0430hrs the 2/5th Marines moved out. A heavy ground fog lay over the fields through which the battalion moved. This fog allowed the Marines to cross most of the distance across the open ground before the Germans saw them and opened fire. Lieutenant Colonel Wise wrote:



Prompt use of local reserves was a hallmark of German defensive doctrine. These German reserve positions are located on the reverse slope of a hill. Using this type of position made it difficult for an enemy to shell them effectively. (General Photographic Agency/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

It was getting lighter every minute. Suddenly the barrage dropped, several hundred yards in front of our lines.

They couldn't see us yet, but they knew from the barrage that the attack was coming.

The barrage lifted and crawled ahead. The whistles of our platoon leaders sounded up and down the line. The battalion rose to its feet. Bayonets fixed, rifles at the ready, the men started their slow advance.

As the Marines vanished into the undergrowth beneath the trees, the German machine-gun fire slackened. The detonations of the barrage had ceased. Across the fields from the woods I could distinguish machine-gun fire, rifle fire. A sudden ripping burst of machine-gun fire would break out. That meant the Marines were advancing on a nest. It would die down. That meant the nest was taken. (Wise 1929: 218–19)

The leading waves suffered heavy losses and paused, the support companies quickly came up, and the mass of troops stormed forward, entering the German positions. Preplanned defensive artillery fire did not occur because German signal rockets were not seen through the fog. Marines had struck the boundary between 237. Infanterie-Division and 28. Infanterie-Division. German positions were

rolled up from their flanks and, as Marines penetrated the wood, from the rear.

The right-flank companies of the 2/5th Marines had expected to meet the 1/6th Marines. Instead, they slowly pushed through the wood until they began to take fire. First Lieutenant Elliot Cooke, US Army Reserve, was commanding the 55th Company:

Through the mist the forest ahead loomed up as a grim shadow. We entered a deep indentation of the woods and the shadows moved to surround us. Without the slightest warning those shadows were suddenly split apart by chattering, stabbing flames. A crackling sheath of machine gun bullets encased our battalion, closing in on us fiercely ...

At that moment a hail came from the woods about one hundred yards to our right.

“Is that the Fifty-first Company?”

An officer I did not know crawled into sight.

“No,” I called back. “This is the Fifty-fifth.”

The officer looked both dismayed and embarrassed.

I was supposed to go forward with the Fifty-first, he said, apologetically.

Then I understood. He commanded the company of the 6th Marines that was to have assisted our attack. Because of the heavy mist he had failed to see our assaulting waves go by. No wonder the 51st had been cut to pieces by flanking machine-gun fire.

I stood up in plain sight and blew a blast on my whistle. From holes, furrows, and clods of dirt, faces looked up. Eyes, thankful to see some-one in authority, watched expectantly. I pointed at the woods to our right front ...

At the trees I turned, half expecting to find ourselves alone. We weren't. About twenty men were right behind us. And more came running, eager to do anything that was wanted. (Quoted in Johnston 1942)

At 0650hrs the 51st Company reported heavy machine-gun fire from their right rear. They had penetrated behind the position held by the Germans and were headed for the eastern edge of Belleau Wood. The Marines responded by attacking toward the source of the fire. Within minutes, men of the 55th and 51st companies attacked 7./FR 40 and 8./FR 40 from the flank and rear. According to Otto, their local reserve was 5./FR 40:



The M1903 Springfield, a .30-caliber bolt-action rifle with a five-round magazine, was the United States' response to the Mauser. It was designed at the US Army Arsenal in Springfield, Massachusetts following the Spanish–American War (1898), during which Spanish troops armed with 7mm M1893 bolt-action “Spanish Mausers” outshot American troops using inferior .30-caliber M1892–99 Krag-Jørgensen bolt-action rifles. The “Springfield” was an excellent rifle and was used by Marines on Guadalcanal in 1942 before being replaced by the .30-caliber M1 Garand semi-automatic rifle. (NRA Museums, NRAMuseums.com)

The captain of the *5th Company, 40th*, standing here in reserve, immediately threw himself upon them. But his company was soon scattered in the thick forest. There remained under his control but few of his men, or of the mine throwing company stationed in the woods, and he was overwhelmed by numbers. His company, together with the *7th* and *8th Companies* of the *40th Regiment*, was attacked flank and rear ... The confusion resulted in the loss of practically the entire personnel of the three companies; but few succeeded in fighting their way through. Those who did not fall were taken prisoners. (Quoted in Amerman 2016: 86–87)

The fighting here lasted for several hours and Füsilier-Regiment 40 put up stouter resistance than the Germans apparently reported. The Marines had to eliminate one position after another and the 51st Company alone suffered 80 casualties. Finally, at 1055hrs the 55th Company reported that it had reached its objective at the eastern edge of Belleau Wood. While the Marines prepared to hold the ground they had taken, I./FR 40 was ordered to counterattack to restore the position lost by its comrades of II./FR 40. Moving toward the eastern edge of Belleau Wood, the battalion was exposed

to heavy fire from the Marines in Bouresches and the 2/5th Marines now at the eastern face of the wood. The firepower of the 2/5th Marines was augmented by their use of captured German machine guns. Now the Germans were trying to advance across open ground. They moved forward about 200yd and halted. Losses were heavy, and with ranks already reduced by casualties incurred during their advance in late May and early June, they were too weak to press on. II./GR 110 joined I./FR 40 and a renewed thrust was attempted. This too was stopped by Marine machine-gun and rifle fire supported by the artillery of the 2d Division. The Germans fell back to their defensive positions around 1900hrs. Elements of Grenadier-Regiment 110 entered the northernmost section of the wood to try to reestablish contact between 28. and 237. Infanterie-Divisionen.

The left wing of the 2/5th Marines, the 18th and 43d companies, attacked I./IR 461. Some of the 43d Company moved through vacated positions that had been held by II./FR 40 and attacked north into Infanterie-Regiment 461's flank and rear. This move quickly rolled up I./IR 461. Some Marines proceeded on to envelop 4./IR 461 farther northward while other Marines pressed on east through the wood. Both I./IR 461 and 4./IR 461 suffered heavy losses. 8./IR 461, which had been positioned to maintain liaison with 28. Infanterie-Division by Major Bischoff, was quickly engaged and driven toward the northeast. The front-line connection between the two divisions was severed. Stationed behind 4./IR 461, 3./IR 461 was sent against the 18th and 43d companies in an effort to stop the Marines' momentum. This company was soon caught up in fierce fighting and became disorganized, joining the survivors of 8./IR 461 in their retreat.

After overrunning the German line north of the breakthrough, most of the Marines returned to their planned direction of advance and headed for the eastern edge of the wood. Prisoners and captured machine guns were sent back to the battalion headquarters. The 43d Company reported that it had reached its objective at 0611hrs and the 18th Company reported its objective taken at 1045hrs. This change of direction allowed survivors of Infanterie-Regiment 461 to retreat without being pursued. The commander of I./IR 461, Major Hartlieb, rallied his survivors and, with 5./IR 461 and 7./IR 461, moved forward to attempt to restore the original line. By 1200hrs the regiment's morning positions were reached where dead and wounded covered the ground. Although his troops were behind the front line of the 2/5th Marines, Hartlieb had little solid information on the location of friendly and enemy forces; many of his men were shaken survivors from the original force and the two fresh companies at his disposal were greatly understrength. Unable to contact any organized Germans on his left and having Americans of unknown strength on three sides, Hartlieb pulled his troops back north to establish a solid line within the wood and restore contact with 28. Infanterie-Division.

Messages sent by, and to, the 2/5th Marines during the attack reveal how the changing situation was viewed amid the confusion of battle:

0550 hours, Wise to Harbord: Firing has begun again. I can hear nothing but the fire of my automatic rifles.

0553 hours, Wise to Harbord: Machine gun fire begins and stops again.

0611 hours, Captain Charles Dunbeck 43rd Company to Harbord: All objectives reached and am mopping up with machine guns.

0650 hours, Captain Lloyd Williams, 51st Company to Harbord: Holding everything. Machine guns are causing damage on our right rear. Request company be sent in.

0855 hours, received 0945, Wise to Harbord: Barrage needed in front of us ... as it is reported Germans are massing in front. Captain Williams wounded. Casualties quite heavy as the barrage did not clean things up. We have the situation in hand but the 6th has not come up on the right.

1015 hours, Wise to Harbord: All companies have obtained their objectives and losses have been so heavy that we are only able to hold one line.

Received at 1250 hours, Wise to Harbord: Artillery officer arrived and will be great help. Positions are now organized and can

get an idea of losses. Think we can get more prisoners as lots of them are hiding afraid to give up, so with German speaking men are going to comb them out. We have lost quite a few officers.

1125 hours, received 1318, Wise to Harbord: I think my left flank is rather weak. The Germans are massing in our front I can hardly spare any men. They could easily filter through tonight for counter attack. Nothing new to report except increased artillery activity.

1340 hours, 5th Marines Adjutant to Harbord: At 12:02 pm troops still reported massing on our front in the direction of Belleau and Torcey and think counterattack is on foot. Companies 43rd, 51st, and 18th have about 30 men each lost and 55th about 83. I hardly believe the latter. (Quoted in Clark 2015: 93–95)

The last message showed the problem of getting accurate information from the front; the 51st Company was hit hardest, losing over 80 men.



American troops advancing through wood and underbrush. Command and control by battalion and company was next to impossible. It fell to the junior officers, NCOs, and even privates to take charge and keep the attack moving forward. (USMCHD, 516420)

Lieutenant Colonel Wise's 1125hrs message summed up the situation; his left flank was in the air and the rear was exposed to a counterattack from the northernmost part of Belleau Wood. Around 1145hrs, Wise personally conducted a reconnaissance of his lines:

Just inside the edge of the wood I came upon one of those German machine guns camouflaged behind a brush pile. Dead Marines lay in front of it. Dead Germans lay about it. A strange silence held in the woods.

I got out to the right of my line, where Captain Lloyd Williams' [51st] company had gone in. They were in foxholes on the far side of the woods. Some junior was in command. Captain Williams had been shot early in the day, I learned. He died that night. The youngster in command told me of the terrific fighting they'd had. Foot by foot they had pushed their way through the underbrush in the face of a continuous machine-gun and rifle fire. Snipers had shot them from brush piles on the ground; from perches high in the trees. Germans they had left sprawled on the ground for dead as they went on, had risen and shot them in the back ... Every one of those four companies had fought its way clear through those woods, from one side to the other ...

"Do we hold the extreme point of the woods at this end?" I asked Captain [Lester] Wass.

"No sir, we don't," he said. "There are a lot of Germans over in that northeast corner. We didn't have enough men to extend over there." (Wise 1929: 220–21)

Wise had discovered that his companies were not in the northern half of the wood as he, some of his

subordinates, and his superiors thought. At 1200hrs, with his battalion's rear exposed, he ordered the 55th Company from his right to move to the left flank and form a refused line. Later, one platoon from the 1/6th Marines was attached to help extend this east-west line while the rest of that battalion adjusted their positions to replace the 55th Company on the eastern edge of the wood. The extended east-west line gave some protection from a feared counterattack. West of Belleau Wood the open ground, which had been between the 2/5th Marines' start line and the German defense line, was covered by machine guns and rifles of other American units.

Marine casualties suffered on June 11 amounted to 6 officers and 176 men killed or wounded in the 2/5th Marines and one officer and 46 men killed or wounded in the 2/6th Marines. German losses were greater. 237. Infanterie-Division listed two officers and 28 men killed, two officers and 114 men wounded, and three officers and 82 men missing. 28. Infanterie-Division listed three officers and 151 men killed, six officers and 355 men wounded, and one officer and 53 men missing. The German count of missing is significantly lower than the 4th Marine Brigade's count of 301 prisoners received at Brigade Headquarters by 2000hrs, June 11, with at least 50 more being used by the 2/5th Marines to carry wounded out of Belleau Wood, and 60 prisoners reported to be in the hands of the 1/6th Marines by that time. The brigade reported three *Minenwerfer* and at least 30 machine guns captured.

Otto's description of the June 11 fighting reported:

The *1st Battalion, 461st* repulsed the enemy in the advanced positions. The *8th Company, 461st*, which formed the connection between the *40th Regiment* and the *1st Battalion 461st*, also met with success. Some 50 dead lay along the front. But the neighbor on the left was not so fortunate. Soon afterward the *8th Company* was completely surrounded from the left and cut off, while the *7th Company, 461st*, was attacked from the rear. On the northeastern corner, also, the enemy was advancing clear through the woods. (Quoted in Amerman 2016: 87)

It appears that 28. Infanterie-Division's II./GR 110 and I./FR 40 in Belleau Wood were first defeated by the 2/5th Marines and retreated from the wood after heavy casualties. Then the 2/5th Marines outflanked I./IR 461 and overran it. The Germans reported that the survivors of II./GR 110 and I./FR 40 were incorporated into I./GR 110.



Trophies, such as these *Minenwerfer*, were considered important to show successes and counts of captured crew-served weapons were featured in commanders' reports. Brigadier General Harbord reported the capture of 59 machine guns and ten *Minenwerfer* on June 12 plus prisoners. (USMCHD, no number)

An early-morning conference was held on June 12 by Brigadier General Harbord with his two regimental commanders and Lieutenant Colonel Wise. Wise informed the attendees that he felt he could eject the Germans from the rest of Belleau Wood in the afternoon if he was given artillery support. Harbord agreed to this, and another attack was planned by the 2/5th Marines for 1700hrs. Artillery started shelling the northern part of the wood at 1600hrs. Wise reported that the artillery preparation did not appear to be sufficient, and so it was extended by 30 minutes. An error in locating the front line in the wood resulted in targeting the artillery fire 800yd behind the German front lines. Because their forward defense positions were not shelled, the Germans recorded this Marine attack as a surprise attack without artillery preparation.

The 2/5th Marines attacked the German line at 1730hrs, following a route straight north. The battalion formed with three companies (the 18th, 43d, and 55th) in line from east to west. The badly battered 51st Company followed. First Lieutenant Cooke continued his narrative:

The Boche heard us coming and gave us all they had. Light machine guns camouflaged in trees, heavy guns on the ground, grenades, rifles, pistols; everything was turned loose at once.

We crushed the German forward line and reached the ravine and clearing where [Lieutenant Edgar] Poe and I had stood the previous day. Headquarters was still persistent in their demands to take prisoners, but we didn't have any. When we rushed through the underbrush there wasn't time to argue about surrendering. We either killed the Boche or they killed us.

"Eyah!" one of 43rd Company men suddenly yelled ...

The battle cry of the Marines! The yell they had learned on the bayonet course, sticking dummies. And in that narrow neck of Belleau Wood it was taken up and shouted savagely.

I candidly admit that the thought of leading a bayonet charge never entered my head. Rushing machine guns with the bayonet was something I could do without ...

Out into the open ground they surged, and much against my better judgment I was carried along in the excitement. Down into the ravine – our momentum carrying us halfway up the opposite side.

The hot blast of guns beat against our faces, grenades curved over our heads, underbrush and men dying clogged our feet. We

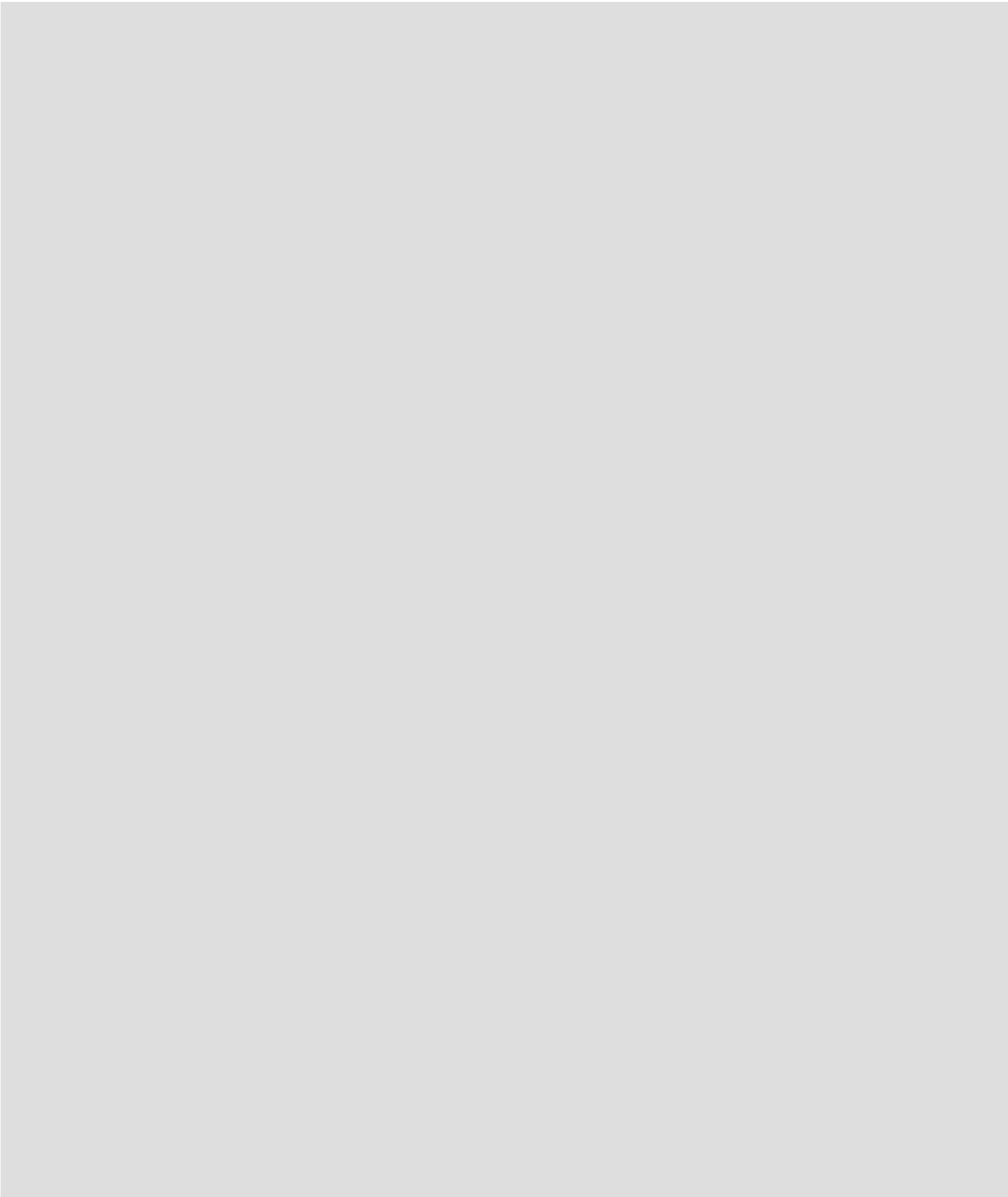
pounded across a road, crashed into some thickets bordering the clearing and stood, wild eyed and panting.

The Boche had slipped into the underbrush and run. And streaming through the woods were the scattered remnants of our battalion, hot in pursuit ... (Quoted in Johnston 1942)

The 2/5th Marines was too weak to hold the entire wood. Once the weakened companies sorted themselves out, they formed a defense line along the eastern edge of the wood and refused their flank, forming a “fish hook” perimeter and leaving the northernmost part of the wood unoccupied. This allowed the survivors of Infanterie-Regiment 461, reinforced by comrades of Infanterie-Regiment 462, to establish a line in the extreme northwest corner of the wood. On June 12 the 2/5th Marines lost two officers and 146 men killed and wounded; 237. Infanterie-Division lost eight killed, 53 wounded, and 64 missing; 28. Infanterie-Division reported 45 killed, 275 wounded, and 36 missing.

It would require a small-scale attack on June 15 by the 17th Company of the 1/5th Marines, reinforced by one platoon from the 49th Company and one from the 66th Company, to link up with the 2/5th Marines and establish a continuous line through the northern portion of Belleau Wood. More attacks would take place before all of Belleau Wood was in American hands, however.

The 2/5th Marines' attack, June 11





At 0430hrs on June 11, the 2/5th Marines attacked across the open ground toward Belleau Wood that had been the scene of the 3/5th Marines' failed attack on June 6. Luck was with the 2/5th Marines as an early-morning ground fog hid the advancing Americans from German sentries. Because the supporting artillery was misdirected and shelled the wood north of the point of the attack, the Germans did not expect an infantry assault. When the first wave of Marines emerged from the fog, the German outposts in the edge of the wood were surprised. Marines quickly entered the wood and the combat became bush fighting at close quarters. In these conditions the superior Marine morale, junior leadership, bayonet practice, and marksmanship dominated the action. Based on experiences with the half-platoon waves in the earlier days' attacks, the 2/5th Marines altered the French tactical deployment. The attack companies still formed in two waves, but now each wave was composed of small mixed groups. These groups were built around either a Chauchat automatic-rifle team or a rifle-grenade-launcher team. The roles of hand grenadiers and riflemen were combined, with each man carrying grenades and ready to use his rifle or grenades as the situation required.

Securing Belleau Wood

June 23–25, 1918

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

Despite the heavy losses sustained attacking Belleau Wood between June 6 and June 14, Marine Corps officers had come to appreciate Brigadier General Harbord's command of the 4th Marine Brigade. The initial resentment at having the Marine Brigadier General Charles Doyen replaced by an Army officer had given way to respect. During a visit in the morning of June 15 to headquarters of the 5th Marine Regiment, the regimental commander, Colonel Wendell Neville, handed a pair of Marine Corps collar insignias to Harbord and told him: "Here, we think it is about time you put these on." Harbord later recalled:

I was as much thrilled by his brusque remark and his subsequent pinning them on my collar the next few minutes as I have ever been by any decoration of the several that have come to me ... I still cherish them among my prize possessions ... It seemed to me to set the seal of approval by my comrades of the Marine Corps, and knowing the circumstances, it meant everything to me.
(Quoted in Asprey 1996: 292)

By June 15, both the 5th and 6th Marine regiments had been in combat for two weeks. They had suffered casualties totaling nearly 50 percent of their strength and were exhausted. The 2d Division had no units to replace the Marines in the line. The 2d Division's commander, Major General Omar Bundy, requested troops for this from his immediate superior headquarters, the 21e Corps d'armée. Unable to obtain troops through normal channels, Bundy took the radical step of unilaterally informing the French corps commander that he, Bundy, would exercise his authority as the senior American officer in the area and assign the US Army's 7th Infantry Regiment temporarily to the 4th Marine Brigade. This regiment was part of the 3d Division, which had been in combat 6 miles to the east at Château-Thierry. The 7th Infantry Regiment was in reserve. Given the American general's ultimatum, the French quickly acceded to his original request, and the 7th Infantry Regiment was sent to relieve the Marines.

Over two nights during June 15–17, the 7th Infantry Regiment relieved the battered Marine units on the front lines. The Marine battalions had suffered heavily between May 31 and June 18 when losses were recorded for four of the six battalions: the 1/5th Marines reported 560 casualties, the 2/5th Marines reported 634, the 2/6th Marines reported 857, and the 3/6th Marines reported 414. Officer casualties had been especially heavy; some companies had lost all of their officers and many of the NCOs who had stepped up to fill the leadership role. Once relocated behind the line, the Marine battalions rested, reorganized, and absorbed replacements.



German sheepdogs were employed as message-carriers by the Kaiser's infantry. Up to six dogs could be given to a battalion. In the static front lines before 1918, dogs could carry a message through a mile of trenches under good conditions in eight minutes, but they were less useful in mobile warfare since they had to learn the route between command posts. Messages were carried in the containers shown between the handlers. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

German personnel of 237. and 28. Infanterie-Divisionen had also been depleted during the fighting in and around Belleau Wood. Infanterie-Regiment 461 paid dearly for its stout defense of the wood. On June 12 it reported nine officers and 149 men fit for duty. On June 13 the entire 237. Infanterie-Division had a rifle strength of 47 officers and 1,482 men; 28. Infanterie-Division had suffered as well, II./FR 40 having been destroyed with its survivors incorporated into the regiment's other battalions. Even before being committed to replace 10. Infanterie-Division, 28. Infanterie-Division was understrength and its own officers felt that the survivors had little fighting value. The only available replacement formation for IV. Reservekorps was 87. Infanterie-Division, rated by the Germans as capable of holding quiet sectors; none the less, it replaced 237. Infanterie-Division in the German defense and became responsible for defending the northern end of Belleau Wood that was still in German hands as well as taking over part of 28. Infanterie-Division's line to the east.

While the Americans replaced Marines with the 7th Infantry Regiment, the Germans rotated units beginning the night of June 15. The commander of the incoming 87. Infanterie-Division recommended abandoning positions in Belleau Wood and forming a line north of the villages of Belleau and Torcey, but IV. Reservekorps ordered the positions within the wood be retained. 87. Infanterie-Division placed Infanterie-Regiment 345 on its western flank, Infanterie-Regiment 347 in its center responsible for Belleau Wood, and Reserve-Ersatz-Infanterie-Regiment 3 on its eastern flank. Each of the flank regiments deployed one battalion forward, one in a second line, and the third in reserve. Infanterie-Regiment 347 was forced to place one battalion in the wood (at first III./IR 347), one on the front to the immediate west of the wood, and one in a reserve position.

The 7th Infantry Regiment and 87. Infanterie-Division contested control of the wood, but the lines remained static. Early in the morning of June 20, the 1/7th Infantry carried out a local attack in

Belleau Wood using two platoons of Company D supported by two platoons from other companies. According to Otto, the attack quickly failed: “without special artillery preparations, they attacked the front of the *347th Infantry* in strong lines of skirmishers, but without success. Patrols from the *3rd Battalion, 347th* found between 60 and 70 American dead in one small area” (quoted in Amerman 2016: 91).

At 4th Marine Brigade Headquarters Harbord and his staff were convinced that only a small party of Germans remained within the wood. To them the failure to clear the wood was explained only by failure of officers and men to aggressively attack a small enemy post. As Harbord communicated to Bundy, “Attack ordered on machine gun nest of northwestern edge of Bois de Belleau failed because companies of 7th Infantry fell back when casualties occurred” (quoted in Asprey 1996: 308). Messages exchanged between Harbord and the commander of the 1/7th Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel John Adams, show that the Brigade Headquarters failed to comprehend the real conditions within Belleau Wood:

20 June, C.G. 4th Brigade to C. O., 1st Bn., 7th Infantry (through C. O., 5th Marines). Your battalion will be relieved tomorrow night. Tomorrow morning is the only chance to redeem the failure made this morning. If you clear the northern half of the Bois de Belleau the credit will belong to 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, and will be given freely. The battalion cannot afford to fail again. (Quoted in US Army 1989: 515)

20 June, Lt. Col. Adams to Headquarters 4th Brigade, enclosure; Orders have been issued for an attack tomorrow morning. Information has reached me that the Germans have filtered through and have in place at least 15 M. G. in and around BELLEAU Woods. They are now firing into rear of Cos. D and C and have moved two guns up toward right flank of Co. B. Under the conditions noted I do not believe any attack without a heavy artillery fire preceding can move the guns from the woods. They are all emplaced and strongly held. The woods is almost a thicket and the throwing of troops into the woods is filtering away men with nothing gained ... (Quoted in US Army 1989: 515–16)

As ordered by 4th Marine Brigade Headquarters, the 1/7th Infantry attacked early in the morning of June 21. The attack was reported to the 4th Marine Brigade by the battalion in the following message: “Attack this morning failed. At the hour of attack, the enemy put down a barrage of great intensity on line of Co. B ... When the barrage lifted, the attack again started, but machine-gun fire stopped further advance. Losses 170 officers and men. Cos. C and D occupy former positions” (Quoted in US Army 1989: 519).



Targeting artillery fire was difficult on a battlefield. Spotters observed where a shell landed and told gunners how to change their range or bearing. Communication was by field telephone, but wires were easily cut by enemy shells and friendly movements. (US Army Signal Corps/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)

During the night of June 21/22, the 3/5th Marines relieved the 1/7th Infantry in Belleau Wood. It fell to the rebuilt 3/5th Marines, now commanded by Major Maurice Shearer, to capture the wood. Facing the 3/5th Marines was I./IR 347, relieving III./IR 347 in the wood. I./IR 347 placed three companies – 2./IR 347, 3./IR 347, and 4./IR 347 – in the front lines and stationed 1./IR 347 in reserve north of the wood.

Securing Belleau Wood, June 23–25, 1918

MAP KEY

- 1 0700hrs, June 23:** The 3/5th Marines is holding the line in the northern portion of Belleau Wood with the 47th, 20th, 16th, and 45th companies in line. The battalion is ordered to attack the Germans of Infanterie-Regiment 347 in the wood during the evening without artillery support.
- 2 1900hrs, June 23:** The 20th and 16th companies attempt to attack German positions using small teams of riflemen supported by automatic-rifle fire and grenades. They make little to no progress forward.
- 3 2000hrs, June 23:** The 47th and 45th companies attack on the flanks of the 20th and 16th companies.
- 4 2200hrs, June 23:** Marines are stopped by German machine-gun fire after capturing a few suspected German positions, but no enemy personnel or weapons are found.
- 5 0030–0400hrs, June 24:** The 3/5th Marines pushes patrols forward which Infanterie-Regiment 347 reports as repulsed attacks. Fighting settles down; at 1100hrs the 3/5th Marines reports that they made no progress and suffered heavy losses.

- 6 0000hrs, June 25:** The Marines withdraw to a line south of survey line no. 262. This provides sufficient separation between friendly and enemy forces required to conduct an intense artillery barrage.
- 7 0300hrs, June 25:** The 15th Field Artillery Regiment starts a 14-hour barrage of the area of Belleau Wood held by Germans. Other 155mm batteries shell suspected enemy reserve locations and artillery positions.
- 8 1600hrs, June 25:** Shelling increases during the final hour and 75mm guns of the 12th Field Artillery Regiment join in the barrage. At 1657hrs the guns start a rolling barrage for infantry to advance behind.
- 9 1700hrs, June 25:** The barrage shifts 100m (109yd) north and the 3/5th Marines advances against the battered and disorganized German lines with the 47th, 20th, and 16th companies in front and the 45th Company following.
- 10 1800hrs, June 25:** The German reserve, 1./IR 347, is committed to stop the advance of the 3/5th Marines. The German company splits up to go to the support of their comrades of 3./IR 347 and 4./IR 347, who are being overwhelmed by Marines.
- 11 1930hrs, June 25:** The connection between 3./IR 347 and 4./IR 347 is severed; Germans to the west withdraw to 2./IR 347's position, while those to the east retreat to the positions of I./REIR 3.
- 12 2200hrs, June 25:** The 2/5th Marines, west of Belleau Wood, link up with the 3/5th Marines.
- 13 2300hrs, June 25:** The northern sector of Belleau Wood is slowly cleared of Germans, many of whom, cut off and surrounded by Marines, surrender. The remaining Germans pull back to a reserve line and cede the woods to the Marines.

Battlefield environment

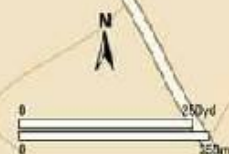
The northernmost section of Belleau Wood had remained in German hands since the attacks of June 11 and 12. Full of tall hardwood trees surrounded by heavy underbrush and second growth, this portion of the wood was a game preserve owned by a rich gentleman who had used it for hunting parties in the days before the war. There was a small clearing here in which a small stone hunting lodge, called the Pavilion, was located. A narrow unimproved road ran through the hunting preserve along with a few winding footpaths. The road running east to west provided the line separating the two sides, with the German defenses on the north side. South of this road was a deep ravine cutting almost across the wood that angled northeast and southwest from the western edge, a little below its northern third. This portion of the wood was small, and as one moved toward the northern edge it narrowed considerably. On June 25, the front line in the wood was approximately 1,000yd. The depth of the wood from this line to its northern edges varied between 100yd and 550yd. Prior to the attack on June 25, this small section of woodland was bombarded with 180 tons of artillery shells that shattered trees, blew away undergrowth, and cratered the soil.



GERMAN DUGOUTS AND TRENCHES
BELLEAU WOODS

Photo BY CHILDRAN

The northern end of Belleau Wood was well fortified by the Germans. Trenches, such as these, were carefully positioned. Machine guns were placed to provide optimal fields of overlapping fire and dugouts provided to withstand shelling. (USMCHD, no number)



INTO COMBAT

Only after the 3/5th Marines replaced the 1/7th Infantry in Belleau Wood did Harbord begin to grasp the extent of the enemy's presence in the wood. He reported to his divisional commander:

The statement made by a German deserter last night that the German line ran through the north end of the Bois de BELLEAU proves to be practically true. Personal reconnaissance by Lieut. Colonel Logan Feland establishes the fact that the tip of the woods is held by the enemy ... Colonel Feland is certain no trenches run through the north end of the woods, but undoubtedly, the Germans have access to that part of the woods and have been free to come and go. The undersigned (*Harbord*) has been misled as to affairs in that end of the woods, either consciously or unconsciously, ever since its first occupation by the battalion, under command of Lieutenant Colonel F. M. Wise, and later by the battalion of the 7th Infantry. (Quoted in US Army 1989: 531)

Despite acknowledging that more than a machine-gun nest held Belleau Wood, Harbord persisted in ordering his Marines to attack on June 23 without proper artillery support, claiming that it was impractical to withdraw in order to permit shelling of the northern corner of the wood. The Marines were to attack relying on their rifles, rifle grenades, hand grenades, and Stokes mortars. The general based his tactics on rifle marksmanship, especially on teams of snipers. The plan of attack was simple: with the 47th, 20th, 16th, and 45th companies in line east to west, the attack would begin with the two center companies moving forward in small groups using rifles and hand grenades. The attackers' only support would come from the companies' rifle grenadiers, Chauchat automatic rifles, and attached machine guns.

The 3/5th Marines launched their first attack at 1900hrs, June 23. Major Shearer reported the outcome of the attack to Brigade in a report at 1100hrs, June 24:

The 16th Company sent out combat groups ahead of the line. These groups encountered several machine-gun positions (number not definite yet) which enemy abandoned on being bombed with grenades. The enemy took out guns, light type, and casualties, but left much ammunition. They apparently fell back to alternate positions as their fire did not seem to slacken. Men of the 16th Co. report that they saw several enemy hit but no prisoners were taken and no bodies available for identification.

This company advanced until machine-gun fire became so heavy as to hold them up; also they lost touch with 20th Co. on right as that Co. was not able to advance to keep connection.

The casualties became so heavy (estimated 1 officer, 75 men) that Captain [Robert] Yowell had to withdraw to his original position to get cover. It was not possible to dig in under the heavy machine-gun fire that every moment brought down. Two enemy artillery barrages were put over, but practically all casualties were from machine guns ...

The 20th Co. sent out combat groups at 7 p. m. and were immediately under heavy machine-gun fire. These groups cleared out about 3 enemy machine-gun positions. Enemy withdrew guns and injured as in case of 16th Company. No prisoners or bodies available for identifications. The attacking line had been moved from its dug in position before the attack to a jumping-off position. Three attempts were made to advance from this position, each time being driven back by heavy enfilade machine-gun fire and one pounders.

The 47th Co. (less 1 platoon operating with 20th Co.) crossed in to their left as 20th Co. cleared old line as per plan. They were under shell fire several times. Casualties (estimated) one officer, 5 men. The 45th Co. (less 50 men with 16th Co.) closed in on right of 47th Co. as per plan. Also were under shell fire. Casualties (estimated) one officer, 28 men. The enemy seems to have unlimited alternate gun positions and many guns. Each gun position covered by others. I know of no other way of attacking these positions with chance of success than one attempted and am of opinion that infantry alone cannot dislodge enemy guns. (Quoted in US Army 1989: 538–39)

87. Infanterie-Division's war diary described this attack:



Once accurate information on the conditions inside Belleau Wood became available, including that derived from interrogations of captured Germans, Harbord concluded that only a full-scale, properly planned, organized, and supported attack would clear the wood. Shown here with German prisoners are (left) Colonel Manus McCloskey, commander 12th Field Artillery Regiment, and (right) Brigadier General Harbord wearing a French helmet. (USMCHD, 14669)

In the sectors of the *345th Inf.* and *3d Res. Ersatz Regts.* infantry activity was slight. In BELLEAU Wood, the enemy attacked for the second time at 10 p. m., after his first attack, at about 8 p. m., had been repulsed everywhere. This attack was likewise repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy, upon call for our artillery barrage.

Beginning at 12:30 a. m., several surprise volleys with rifle grenades were fired upon the *1st Bn., 347th Inf. Regt.* At the same time, hostile patrols were feeling their way against the right flank of that battalion: the patrols were driven off. At 3 a. m., a hostile thrust directed against the center of the battalion was repulsed.

At 4 a. m. the enemy advanced once more against the right and left wings of the Battalion, but without success. In front of the left wing, the enemy is now lying at a distance of about 50 to 75 meters [55–82yd]. During the attacks, the enemy advanced cautiously by crawling, camouflaged by green branches fastened to the helmets. (Quoted in US Army 1989: 620)

The failure of the attack on June 23 forced the brigade and division commanders to reevaluate the situation. For over a week infantry alone had not been able to clear the northern end of Belleau Wood. A conference was held June 24 to decide the future course of action; present were Bundy, Harbord, Brigadier General William Chamberlaine (2d Field Artillery Brigade), Colonel Wendell Neville (commanding the 5th Marine Regiment), Lieutenant Colonel Harry Lee (commanding the 6th Marine Regiment), and several battalion commanders including Major Shearer. The commanders decided to employ the full weight of the 2d Division's artillery to prepare for the attack.

The artillery barrage required the men of the 3/5th Marines to withdraw from their front-line positions to avoid being shelled themselves. The artillery's plan called for four batteries of 155mm howitzers of the 17th Field Artillery Regiment to shell the northernmost part of the wood; two 155mm batteries of the regiment shelled positions immediately to the east of the wood where connecting enemy defenses were located. Two 75mm gun batteries of the 12th Field Artillery Regiment shelled German front lines within the wood and two other 75mm batteries of that regiment shelled positions and approach routes just to the west of Belleau Wood. Belleau village and German positions in the rear would be shelled by 155mm batteries of France's 333e Régiment d'artillerie lourde.

The artillery commenced firing at 0300hrs, June 25. At 1600hrs the shelling increased in intensity for the final hour before the 3/5th Marines launched its assault. The shelling inflicted heavy losses on the defending Germans who mistook the 100lb shells of the 155mm howitzers as fire from large-caliber trench mortars. According to Otto: “Simultaneously, medium and heavy mine throwers directed a fire on the part of the woods held by us. At 6:00 p.m. the adjoining battalions and the artillery positions also came under fire. The companies on the left, the *3rd and 4th of the 347th Regiment*, suffered severe losses, since the mines burst for the most part in the trees” (quoted in Amerman 2016: 92). The shelling also struck 5./IR 347 west of the wood and I./REIR 3 east of the wood. Among the casualties caused by the barrage were two of the three German company commanders in the wood.

At 1700hrs the barrage shifted to the north and the 3/5th Marines moved forward. Major Shearer had ordered his Marines to regulate their advance so as not to exceed 100m (109yd) every three minutes. The battalion attacked on a three-company front: the 47th, 20th, and 16th formed east to west, with the 45th Company in reserve. Their objective had been clearly defined to all personnel – to reach and secure the north edge of the wood. As the Marines advanced they were met by heavy rifle fire but little machine-gun fire. The artillery had destroyed or disorganized the all-important machine-gun nests. At 1755hrs Major Shearer reported to brigade via the regimental headquarters:

Attack started O. K. at 5 p. m. Heavy firing on us just before we jumped off. Several casualties. Very little machine-gun fire. Telephone line out. Runner reported 7 prisoners and one captain also prisoner, carrying back wounded. The two left platoons 16th Company reported grenades and sniper working on them. No report from companies yet. Will go through if humanly possible. (Quoted in US Army 1989: 551)

All the Marine companies were advancing and the Germans were losing ground. At around 1800hrs, 1./IR 347 was brought forward to try to stem the tide and was quickly distributed among the positions that 3./IR 347 and 4./IR 347 were trying to hold and attempted local counterattacks. When these reinforcements proved inadequate, I./IR 347 requested the regiment’s reserve battalion, III./IR 347, be sent forward. Higher command refused this request, instead ordering the adjacent Reserve-Ersatz-Infanterie-Regiment 3 to send two of its reserve companies. Around 1930hrs the Marines severed the connection between 3./IR 347 and 4./IR 347 and drove the survivors toward 2./IR 347 to the west and I./REIR 3 to the east.



The final attack on Belleau Wood succeeded proper artillery preparation and a rolling barrage preceded the infantry assault. 155mm howitzers, such as those shown here, provided the heavyweight (100lb per round) shelling needed to disrupt and destroy enemy defenses. (Print Collector/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Fighting within Belleau Wood was at close range. Private Frank M. Jacobs of the 47th Company described his experiences:

When within a few yards of them, about to face them with a bayonet, we had a way of yelling like a bunch of wild Indians that scared the Boche half to death. They would become so perplexed that often we found them waiting for us with their hands up whining, "Kamerad." We shot down the majority for we knew if we gave them a chance they would pump us full of machine gun bullets. When we came close to them, they would jump out of their holes and attempt to be friendly. We took a few prisoners for the purpose of getting information from them.

In this attack, a clump of woods on our left had been overlooked by us. It was full of Huns, manning machine guns. As they were on our left flank, they were a terrible menace to us. In gaining our objective we lost pretty heavily, and most of the men who were fortunate enough to escape alive were wounded, or utterly exhausted, and nearly dead from hunger and thirst.

A volunteer party was asked to clear out the woods. Death seemed certain for those attempting this deed, but despite that fact and all they had already suffered, there were more volunteers than were needed, ready and glad to make the supreme sacrifice to make our left flank safe.

I was fortunate to be numbered among the twelve who attempted the clearing of the wood. We carried out our orders successfully, but we lost seven out of twelve. But we realized we could not complain, for ordinarily, in an attack of this kind, a platoon would have been necessary to accomplish what we did. (Quoted in Hamilton & Corbin 1919: 49–51)

At 1900hrs Shearer reported progress to Harbord:



The 14-hour artillery preparation shattered what remained of Belleau Wood. Trees were blown down or had their branches stripped off. The ground was covered with shell holes and what had been a wood became a scene of devastation. (USMCHD, 519183)

47th Co. gained objective – 20th and 47th digging in. 45th still in reserve, but will occupy positions just as soon as things settle. 16th still working into position. Estimated 150 prisoners by 20th and 47th Companies. No report of 16th as to prisoners. More prisoners just coming in, too numerous to count. I am making prisoners dig and carry wounded. Every one doing fine work. Yowell, 16th. meeting resistance. Will send him help. Will need all my companies to hold new line. Can't Keyser send me two platoons? Just reported counterattack on 47th. Am sending two platoons, 45th to help. Report capture of some of the 47th Co. Our casualties will make help necessary. Please keep artillery and machine guns going to stop reinforcements of enemy. (Quoted in US Army 1989: 552)

With the 3/5th Marines slowly clearing Belleau Wood but taking heavy casualties doing so, extra men were needed. Now that he was on the verge of capturing the wood, Harbord reacted. At 2220hrs he sent Neville the following message:



Despised by Marines, the French Chauchat automatic rifle weighed 20lb and used French 8mm Lebel ammunition. Its effective range was 220yd and it was highly inaccurate. Its only virtue was its ease of manufacturing. (USNPS Photo, Springfield Armory National Historic Site, SPAR 2865)

Your Shearer battalion has done splendid work. I have no fear of a counterattack by the Germans tonight. You are in charge of the Bois de BELLEAU and can divert such part of Major Sibley's battalion as you think best. His front is practically wired in. In connection with the movement of Keyser's battalion to connect up with the west side of the Bois de BELLEAU. I have ordered him to send a platoon by his right rear to come up on the left of the 16th Company and help clean that edge of the woods. It is very important that Shearer be told of this in order that the 16th Company may not, in the dark, confuse that platoon with the enemy.

Colonel Neville quickly sent elements of Major Sibley's 3/6th Marines to relieve those of Major Shearer's battalion that were holding the eastern side of the wood. Major Ralph Keyser's 2/5th Marines to the west pushed into the wood to link up with the 16th Company. This help allowed Shearer to concentrate his battalion's strength on clearing the northernmost section of the wood.

On the German side the remnants of I./IR 347 and 5./IR 347 pulled out of the wood and took up defensive positions between the wood and Belleau village. Here they were joined by two companies of Reserve-Ersatz-Infanterie-Regiment 3. Isolated detachments of Infanterie-Regiment 347 continued to fight in the wood and the Marines mopped up the opposition. Some isolated Germans resisted tenaciously; others began to give up. During this fighting there occurred an incident that swiftly entered Marine lore. Private Henry Lenert of the 16th Company, serving as a runner, was carrying a message to Captain Yowell from battalion headquarters when he encountered a group of Germans, including a machine-gun team. Lenert took cover but was quickly captured and questioned by a German officer. The officer, who switched from halting English to German once Lenert made it clear he could speak that language, asked the identity of Lenert's unit. Upon being told it was the 5th Marine Regiment, the officer asked Lenert which Allied units were behind his regiment. Unsure which friendly forces were in place, Lenert told the officer that the whole of the 6th Marine Regiment was present. After conferring with his comrades, the German officer offered his surrender to Lenert, who promptly accepted it (Clark 2013: 209–10). Private Lenert returned to the American lines with 83 prisoners; he was awarded the Silver Star.

By the morning of June 26 the 3/5th Marines was digging defenses on the northern edge of Belleau Wood overlooking the terrain to the north and Belleau village. Capturing the last part of the wood cost the 3/5th Marines approximately 250 men. 87. Infanterie-Division reported that I./IR 347 and II./IR 347 lost seven officers and 433 non-commissioned officers and enlisted; of these, two officers and 64 other ranks were listed as wounded, the remainder dead or missing. The Marines counted over 260 prisoners and collected 30 light and heavy machine guns. After 25 days of fighting, Shearer could now report to Harbord: "Belleau Wood now U.S. Marine Corps entirely."



The clearing of Belleau Wood resulted in many prisoners. Defending the northern end, 87. Infanterie-Division was a low-grade position division and did not fight with the spirit shown by 237. Infanterie-Division. The experience of fighting fresh American troops began to corrode German morale. (USMCD, 35-J-521205)

Analysis

The fighting at Belleau Wood saw an inexperienced but highly motivated infantry force attacking an experienced, desperate, and somewhat fragile adversary. The Marines had limited exposure to the grim realities of warfare on the Western Front. Their experience was limited to periods of serving in the trenches of semi-quiet sectors around Verdun. Their opponents, even those divisions rated as position divisions by the OHL, were led by experienced officers and included many veterans. This German experience was a double-edged sword: they were war weary, and as initial offensive successes turned into defending newly captured territory against fresh, eager, and well-supplied Americans, German morale started to decline.

While the 4th Marine Brigade was arriving near Belleau Wood, the Germans were shifting to defense. Their defensive doctrine relied on extensive use of machine guns with preplanned artillery fire to disrupt and stop an attacker. Battle control was in the hands of local commanders. Reserves were placed under the control of this local commander, even if led by an officer senior in rank. This eliminated confusion caused by a change of command and allowed quick and effective employment of reserves. Initiating prompt counterattacks before an attacker could consolidate was a component of this doctrine and required careful placement of reserves at all levels of command.



German infantry posing for the camera in positions located in wooded terrain. By 1918 German infantry had a record of success against Russian, Serbian, and Romanian armies and expected to be superior to the new American army of inexperienced leaders and soldiers. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

A sound doctrine requires competent leaders to implement it. The initial defense of Belleau Wood was organized by Major Otto Bischoff, commander of Infanterie-Regiment 461. His defense deviated from the doctrine by placing two of his three battalions in the front. He chose this course based on his experiences of African bush fighting, an environment more akin to that found within Belleau Wood than the conditions of the Somme or Flanders to which many Germans were accustomed. His success in stopping the attack of June 6 showed the wisdom of his scheme; but his advice was not followed by 28. Infanterie-Division's Füsilier-Regiment 40, which took over the southern section of the wood. The Marines' June 11 attack struck Füsilier-Regiment 40's line and, in the confusion of bush fighting,

smashed the German defenses and their reserves as they tried to move up. The collapse of 28. Infanterie-Division's defense allowed the Marines to roll up Infanterie-Regiment 461's line and move into the northern half of Belleau Wood.



Marines quickly learned that they needed to deploy in small groups, rushing from cover, such as shell holes, while other troops maintained covering fire. No longer would well-ordered skirmish lines be employed on battlefields. (USMCHD, 42763)

The Germans had few lessons to learn from Belleau Wood at the tactical level. Their doctrine worked, when, as explained above, commanders adapted it to the local conditions. No new doctrine publications or orders were generated from this fight. The fight for Belleau Wood reinforced the Germans' desire to increase the light-machine-gun complement of their infantry companies, and accelerated the trend to make the rifleman a support to the machine gun. Within months, a new organization for infantry battalions was issued that called for a reduction from four to three rifle companies and the conversion of more infantry into machine-gun crews.

There were other lessons, however, and these were ominous. For the first time the German Army had fought Americans in a stand-up fight. The belief that Americans would not fight was dispelled and they discovered that Americans fought hard to win and accepted casualties. Some German intelligence reports described Americans as dangerous savages even if they belittled the Americans' tactical performance. Once again the ability of the Allies to stop a German offensive re-confirmed that a successful break could be achieved but not cause the collapse of the enemy. With the 1918 offensives taking an ever-increasing toll on irreplaceable German manpower, the specter of millions of fresh Americans entering combat meant continued attrition was a sure road to defeat. To some Germans, it was clear that if a peace settlement was not quickly obtained, defeat at the hands of the Allies was inevitable.

The Marines had failed to use the French infantry doctrine as a guide, modified as needed to account for actual conditions in the field. As a result, the attack by the 3/5th and 3/6th Marines on June 6 was doomed to failure when they rigidly followed its formation. Advancing across open wheat fields toward an experienced enemy occupying prepared positions, the 3/5th and 3/6th Marines moved without proper artillery preparation and a rolling barrage. The lack of artillery support has been attributed to Brigadier General Harbord's belief that Belleau Wood was unoccupied or just lightly held. He did not push patrols into the wood to verify this, however. If patrols had been sent, and the wood found empty, a quick occupation could follow. Had patrols encountered German defenses, the assumption of an unoccupied objective would have been disproven with minimal losses.

The June 11 attack by the 2/5th Marines succeeded despite poor artillery preparation. This success is attributable to the change of the German defenses within the wood and the dense ground fog that covered the battalion's approach. This natural "fog of war" permitted the 2/5th Marines to enter the wood where, once in close combat, Marine marksmanship and bayonet training dominated the fighting. Within the tangled growth of Belleau Wood, small groups of Marines acted on their own,

driving through to the eastern edge and then moving north through the heart of the wood.

Throughout the fighting, the poor quality of French maps exerted a great influence. These maps showed elevations using hachure marks, not contours. The size of Belleau Wood was larger than shown on these maps and the nature of the interior of the wood was unknown. At first, some assumed that the interior was cleared of underbrush and neatly maintained, much like a French garden. The wild growth and tangled underbrush, along with huge boulders and sharp contours, were unexpected discoveries for the Marines. The French maps caused mistakes in reported positions and confusion about the location of the northern edge of the wood.

Command and control of the fighting at Belleau Wood was micromanaged by 4th Marine Brigade Headquarters. Brigade orders frequently specified what individual battalion commanders were to do. Regimental commanders ended up serving as message relays more often than not. This impaired the ability of commanders above battalion level to influence the progress of the battle. By focusing its attentions on battalion details, the brigade appears to have failed to liaise and coordinate fully with supporting arms, particularly the divisional artillery brigade. Because battlefield communications relied on telephone wire that was constantly being cut by artillery shells and moving vehicles, runners had to serve as the communications channel, many times resulting in delayed orders and situation reports.

Marines and their Army comrades were learning their business in the blast furnace of combat. Unfortunately, education came with the price of thousands of dead and wounded Marines and soldiers. The June 25 attack was the first 4th Marine Brigade attack that benefited from the “graduate schooling in war” that they had received from their German opponents. Commanders now understood that there was no shortcut to capturing the remainder of Belleau Wood: Marines in the front lines, in places as close as 55yd to 87. Infanterie-Division, had to withdraw, despite their reluctance to give up captured ground, in order to prevent incurring casualties from friendly artillery fire. The pre-attack barrage dedicated five batteries (20 guns) of 155mm howitzers for over 14 hours to prepare for the attack while other batteries shelled German artillery and reserve positions. To support the advance of the 3/5th Marines, a rolling barrage of 75mm shells preceded the attackers, moving forward 100m (109yd) every three minutes.

This preparatory barrage delivered approximately 3,600 155mm shells, each weighing 100lb. This amounted to 180 tons of shells delivered into an area 0.23 miles (0.6km) square. Scaled to a square kilometer this would have been equivalent to a barrage weight of 300 tons per square kilometer. Studies by the British Army’s No. 2 Operational Research Section in 1944 determined that a barrage weight of 200 tons per square kilometer resulted in successful infantry attacks, provided that the attacking infantry followed the barrage and quickly closed with the enemy. With 1.5 times the needed weight of barrage and the attacking Marines following within minutes of the shelling, the June 25 attack was designed and organized for success.

The attack on June 25 demonstrated that a successful attack against the Germans required a correct assessment of the enemy’s strength and position, careful and complete staff work, and proper use of supporting artillery. Other lessons learned included attaching machine-gun companies to the battalions on a semi-permanent basis under the command of the battalion. Additionally, regimental support weapons – 3in Stokes mortars and 37mm infantry guns – would now be placed under a battalion commander’s control when assigned to support his battalion.

For the 4th Marine Brigade, the weeks of fighting for Belleau Wood provided its first experience

of the real war on the Western Front. The lessons learned came at a high price, but the Marines persevered and adapted.

Aftermath

The 4th Marine Brigade did not win World War I at Belleau Wood; and it is incorrect to claim that the battle of Belleau Wood alone stopped the German 1918 offensives – the Germans launched two more major offensives after June 6, 1918, one in June and one in July. The real impact of Belleau Wood was on morale. In the first days of June 1918, it appeared to many Frenchmen that the Germans were advancing on Paris. Then correspondent Floyd Gibbons' dispatch, written before he was wounded on June 6, announcing that Marines were going into the attack was released by an AEF censor who thought Gibbons' wound was mortal. Suddenly, headlines proclaimed that US Marines were attacking the Germans. To many civilians, it appeared that a few Americans had saved Paris. Allied, especially French, morale was visibly raised. An American liaison officer at the French Army's high command reported to General Pershing on June 8 on a conversation with a French staff officer: "the beneficial morale effect produced on the French troops at seeing Americans fighting at their side, and fighting with such success and valor, could not be overestimated and conversely the presence of so many Americans, fighting vigorously, must be a very unwelcome and disheartening realization to the Germans" (quoted in Asprey 1996: 225–26).

As the French officer theorized, German morale was impacted. The German high command realized that if the Americans fought well, the Allies would be heartened. They also knew that if they could not break Franco-British morale in 1918 and get a peace conference, the Americans would be present with greater numbers and resources in 1919 and Germany's defeat would be inevitable. By the end of June 1918, it was clear to both the Germans and the Allies that the United States was in the war and meant to fight to the end.

The US Marines captured the headlines and imagination of their countrymen and allies. Many in the US Army resented the publicity the Marines received, but that publicity was a result of AEF censorship policy that prevented mention of units in the press. As a separate service, correspondents could use the name "Marines," but were not allowed to name an Army infantry brigade or regiment. A small and easily identifiable contingent within the larger, amorphous AEF, the Marine brigade quickly became well known.

After Belleau Wood, the 4th Marine Brigade and its parent 2d Division were among the premier elements of the AEF. The 2d Division went on to serve as an elite attack division in French and American offensives; the 10e Armée's offensive at Soissons in late July, the US First Army's Saint-Mihiel Offensive in early September, the capture of Blanc Mont, which had defied repeated French attacks since 1915, in September, and finally the AEF's Meuse–Argonne Offensive. In these operations the 4th Marine Brigade continued to enhance its record. After the Armistice, the 4th Marine Brigade marched into Germany as part of the US Third Army. The brigade remained on occupation duty until summer 1919 when it, along with all of the 2d Division, returned to the United States.



German troops on the march. During and after the struggle for Belleau Wood the Germans redeployed and launched more offensives. General Erich Ludendorff continued to bleed his armies, hoping to demoralize the Allies. Unfortunately for Ludendorff and Germany, the fighting by American divisions at Belleau Wood and Château-Thierry had lifted Allied morale and made the US Marines famous. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Stephen Bull)

For their German opponents, the road after Belleau Wood was one littered with continued defeats. In July, 10. Infanterie-Division served as an attack formation in Germany's Marne Offensive and was heavily battered by the 3d Division. To make up losses, it absorbed 255. Infanterie-Division in August and ceased to be rated as an attack division. Moved to a position in the Saint-Mihiel sector, it suffered heavy casualties from American attacks in September. Again, 10. Infanterie-Division absorbed other, lower-quality, units (Infanterie-Regimenter 257, 332, and 419 in October) to make up losses. 28. Infanterie-Division was sent to the Rheims sector where it defended against the Franco-American offensive in July. Afterward, this division served in quiet sectors, no longer being rated an attack division. 87. Infanterie-Division was sent to oppose the British offensives in the Somme region where it suffered heavy losses between August 26 and September 11. The division was then assigned to defending sectors that were not expected to be targets of major attacks. 197. Infanterie-Division was sent to a quiet sector near Verdun, then it too went to oppose the British offensive in the north. Having suffered heavy losses, the division was broken up in late October and used as replacements. 237. Infanterie-Division, which had defended Belleau Wood so well in early June, was posted to the Argonne Forest and absorbed 2,000 replacements. The division was then sent to oppose the British and finished the war in the north. At the end of October, 237. Infanterie-Division's rifle strength was 800. This division started 1918 with high morale, but it quickly deteriorated after June; on August 22, 80 fully equipped men of the division surrendered to a four-man French patrol.

Today the 5th Marine Regiment is part of the 1st Marine Division and the 6th Marine Regiment is part of the 2d Marine Division. Both regiments have proud histories that accord a special place for their predecessors who helped establish the modern US Marine Corps during the bloody month of June 1918. Frequently, four battles are cited as defining moments in the history of the Corps: Belleau Wood, Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Inchon. Belleau Wood, renamed *Bois de la Brigade de Marine* by a 6e Armée order of June 30, 1918, is a memorial to the Marines who fought and died there and site

of an American war cemetery.



On August 12, 1919 the colors of the US Marine Corps passed President Woodrow Wilson in front of the White House, Washington, DC as the 4th Marine Brigade and their US Army comrades of the 2d Division marched in a victory parade. (USMCHD, no number)

UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

Marine infantry battalion

Within the AEF-pattern battalion, the four rifle companies each contained four rifle platoons of 59 men and a command group of 20 men. An AEF platoon's official organization consisted of a six-man command element and four unequal sections: 1st section of 12 hand grenadiers, 2d of nine rifle grenadiers, 3d of 17 riflemen, and 4th of 15 automatic riflemen. This organization was difficult to control and was quickly replaced in the field by one that organized a rifle platoon into two half-platoons, each led by a sergeant. A half-platoon had four groups, each led by a corporal: 1st group with seven riflemen; 2d group with seven hand grenadiers; 3d group with three rifle grenadiers; and 4th group with six automatic riflemen. The strength of a half-platoon was 28 men on paper. The riflemen, hand grenadiers, and rifle grenadiers carried the M1903 Springfield rifle. Each half-platoon included two French Chauchat automatic rifles.

German infantry battalion

The 1918 German infantry regiment contained three battalions (numbered I., II., and III.). Each battalion comprised four rifle companies (singular *Kompagnie*) and one machine-gun company (*Maschinengewehr-Kompagnie* or MGK). Rifle companies were numbered 1 to 12, and organized in battalions by sequence, thus II. Bataillon of a regiment had companies numbered 5 through 8. Machine-gun companies were numbered with the battalion's number, 2. MGK being in II. Bataillon. A rifle company had three platoons (*Züge*) organized into four sections. Each *Kompagnie* was to have at least three light machine guns (crews for these had to be found from among the riflemen). For the 1918 offensives, the authorized rifle strength of a battalion, not counting the MGK, was set at 850. The machine-gun company had a personnel strength between 130 and 140 men. By June, many units would be understrength as the numbers of replacements failed to keep up with battlefield casualties.



German infantry going “over the top.” This photograph appears staged, probably for the home front, as evidenced by the soldier standing on the right facing the camera; it gives a good view of well-equipped German troops. The soldiers look fresh, healthy, and issued with the latest equipment. Only the assault units in 1918 would have been this well fed and equipped. (Photo by ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

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The small stone hunting lodge (the Pavilion) in the northern part of Belleau Wood came to symbolize the capture of the wood. Shown here after the battle, it was damaged by artillery and abandoned. The hunting preserve around it would no longer host rich gentlemen's hunting parties. (USMCHD, no number)

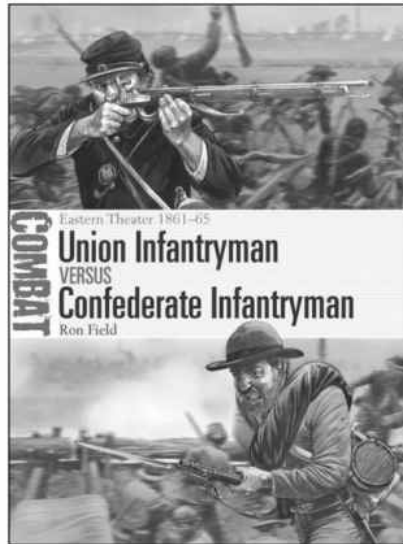
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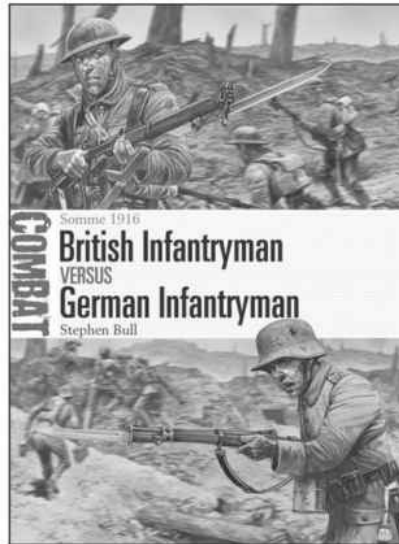
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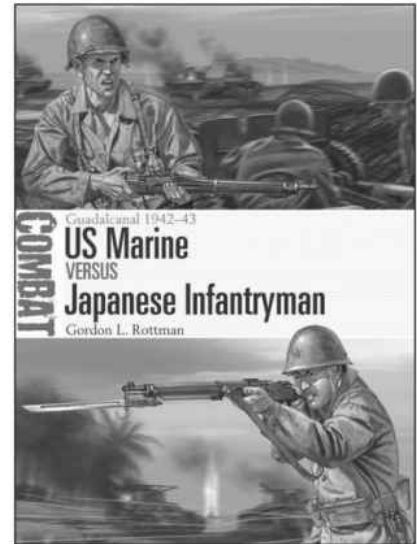
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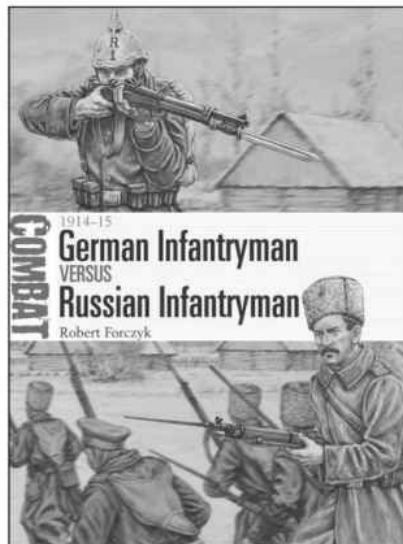
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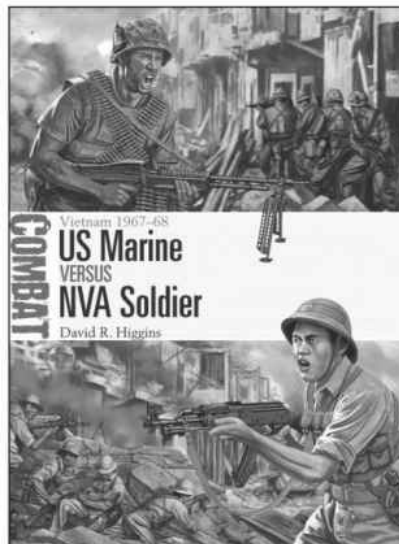
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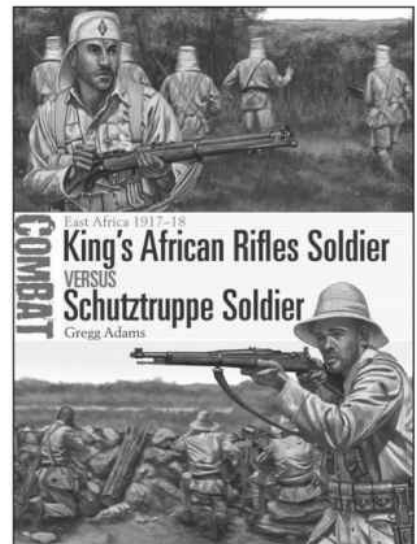
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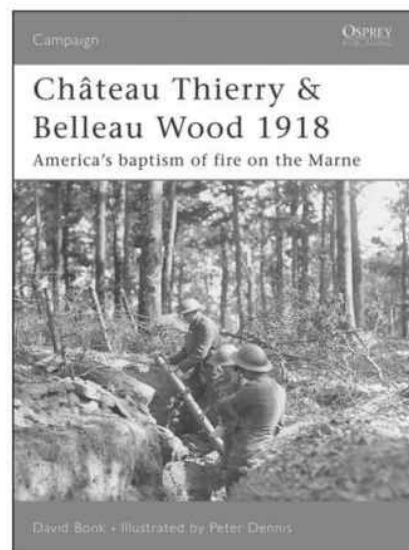
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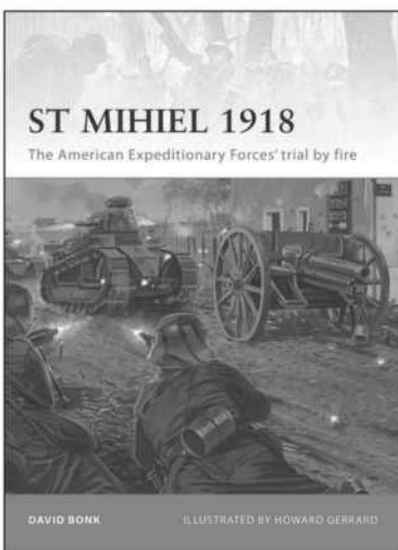
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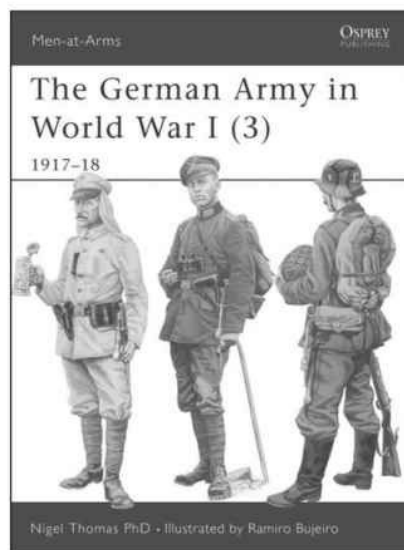
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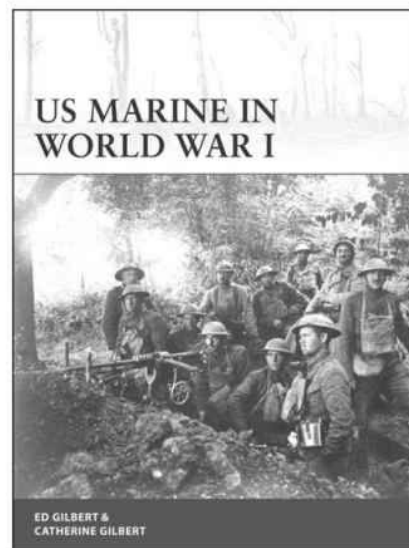
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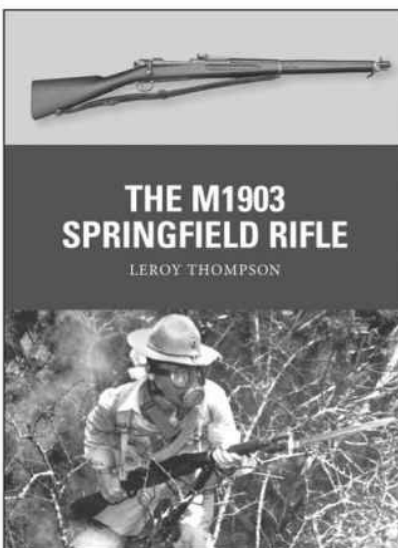
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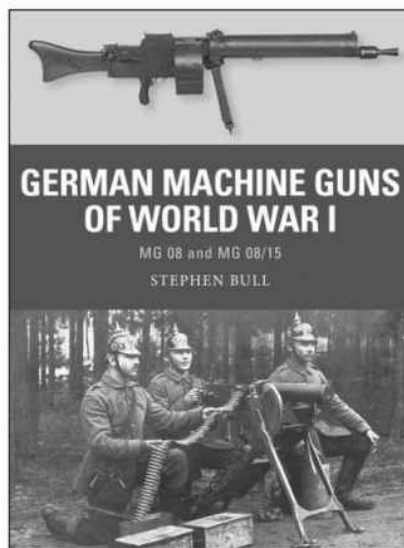
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Editor's note

In the German Army, infantry regiments were variously designated *Infanterie*, *Grenadier*, *Füsilier*, and other forms; these were normally honorific titles that did not define the combat role of that regiment. While the US Marine Corps used Arabic numerals for infantry battalions, the German Army used roman numerals. In the US Marine Corps, each individual company retained its number, whereas German companies were given Arabic numerals in a sequence throughout the three battalions of an infantry regiment. In this book, battalion and company designations are abbreviated. For example, the second battalion of Infanterie-Regiment 461 is shown as II./IR 461, and the seventh company of Füsilier-Regiment 40 is shown as 7./FR 40.

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